

LUCK OF THE YEAR

E.V. LUCAS



**LUCK OF
THE YEAR**

E. V. LUCAS

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-

LUCK OF THE YEAR

ESSAYS, FANTASIES AND
STORIES

BY

E. V. LUCAS



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LUCK OF THE YEAR. I

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MY FIRST AUTHORS

A LADY whose wishes are commands having asked me to tell her who was the first author I ever saw, I set my memory to work and told her. The first authors (I said) I ever saw I used to see at Brighton in the eighteen-eighties, and I am putting them in the plural because I used to see them at the same time: William Black and Edmund Yates. Both were regular figures beside the sea, but William Black walked only between his house on the Marine Parade and the Aquarium and back again, whereas Edmund Yates was true to the King's Road. Both were almost invariably alone.

William Black (I said) I remember as a short man with strongly magnifying glasses, a bristling moustache, and a face of almost fierce redness, with an expression that suggested melancholy. He walked with decision, and mechanically, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and probably was usually working out a new story.

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Most of his stories I had read, and I often wonder how I should like them now, but it is long since I tried one. He brought Brighton in as a background more than once—*The Beautiful Wretch*, I fancy, was all Brighton—and in *Kilmeny*, one of his most charming, without any of the tragic quality of *Macleod of Dare*, for example, he took some of the character to Lewes. Would it not be worth while for a publisher to try to revive interest in these once so delightful books? And in Marion Crawford's too?

Edmund Yates, who belonged to a very different type, walked never, but, bland and placid and prosperous, very like a retired Cavalry colonel, paced up and down, majestically and ponderously, on a black horse: the kind of horse that a circus lady converts into a ball-room floor. Never by these eyes was the horse seen to trot.

Those were my first authors—and boy as I was, I had probably read more of William Black than any other Brighton promenader, and more of Edmund Yates than any promenader anywhere, for we had on our shelves a copy of *The Business of Pleasure*, which at the age of about twelve I had much preferred to any of his novels. Those I had read later. They are, I suppose, as obsolete as anything that the mid-

My First Authors

dle nineteenth century produced. No publisher, by any means short of dynamite, could draw new attention to them.

Another literary character—with, however, only a very slender tie with the Muses—who also was an habitu  of the Brighton front in those days was a very artificial gentleman indeed, almost too carefully preserved, with a moustache and imperial and, I fancy, a monocle, and an eye for every girl that passed. He dressed, in summer, entirely in white, and carried a white umbrella. In fact, the last of the dandies, a Regency survival, with more than a touch of the Second Empire added. This was the Hon. Hugh Rowley, who painted fans and was the author of two futile and irritating books of facetiousness: *Puniana* and *More Puniana*.

And one day at Victoria Station, on his way to catch the Brighton train, I was shown a corpulent and rather violently dressed elderly man, who was wearing a white waistcoat and light check trousers and, I think, white spats. He had a fiery misshapen nose and one of his eyes was oddly screwed up; under his arm was a mass of papers.

“Who do you think that is?” I was asked.
“That’s the great George Augustus Sala!”

I was properly thrilled, for in those days I

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read his "Echoes of the Week" in the *Illustrated London News*.

These luminaries I watched only from a distance. The first man of letters who ever spoke to me and whom I falteringly answered was a poet—also, as it happens, an Honourable—who, on his moody and lonely walks, looked, in his heavy cape and open collar, with his deeply scarred melancholy face, half a Byron and half a priest tortured by spiritual doubt. This was Roden Noel, author of *A Little Child's Monument*.

I remember that he told me rather a nice story about a luncheon or dinner with some local critics at which the cordial reception given to his latest book was much mentioned and always with an odd surprise. One of the party had seen a very friendly review of it in the *Morning Mail*, another in the *Evening Mercury*, a third in the *Weekly Argonaut*; and each in turn wondered why, and then all collectively wondered why. "Possibly," was the poet's contribution toward solving this strange mystery, "because the reviewers liked it"; a point of view that did not seem to have struck any of them.

Having made my own unfamiliar excursion into the art of reminiscence, I have been thinking that it is not the first real authors whom they see—the known names on title-pages—that are

My First Authors

so exciting and impressive to the young, but the first persons of all who have got things into print: amateurs, may be, but rendered sacred by their traffic with the mystery and glory of type. Every town has some such inhabitant to be pointed out as one who writes, even though writing only in the local Press, or issuing verses in that most ignominious of literary forms, the booklet; and he is a figure to be worshipped, not so much because of his merit as because of our tender years.

In my own case, my first amateur author was, also at Brighton, a strange shambling figure, with an old frock-coat floating in the wind as he rushed along the Front, his eager grey beard thrust forward on a lean neck and his hands full of papers. His name was Alfred de Keyzer and he was a poet. He said so himself. The papers that he always carried were leaflets on which his occasional verses were printed and to this day I remember a line in a description of the town, with special reference to the habitués of the Pier:

Brilliant night moths and butterflies of day.

It must have been about the same time that I met my first poetess: a little chirpy spinster, very brisk and plump, whom at the age of eight or nine, and at a distance, I revered. She

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lived in a Sussex village, where she won her fame and my respect by contributing obituary and other verses to a corner of the weekly paper, whence they were often reprinted on memorial cards. One of these cards was on the mantelpiece of the farmhouse where I was staying, and I am sure I am not exaggerating when I say that the moment in which Miss C—— was displayed to me as the actual person who had written that poem was, till then, the most thrilling of my life.

From that instant I looked upon her with wonder and awe, and every time she laughed a wave of surprise and disappointment ran over me. For he is an exacting tyrant, the young hero-worshipper. He wants everything as he wants it.

THE LOST STICK

AT this minute somewhere there is a walking-stick whose one wish in life is to leave its present user and get back to me, its rightful owner; but what can it do? A mere voiceless piece of wood, what can it do? Yet all its thoughts I know are with me.

The malignity of inanimate objects is a theme which has often occupied humorous writers—I remember JAMES PAYN being very characteristic about it: a dropped collar stud, I think it was, that set him off—but what fills me with concern is their inanimacy. It is not their bad qualities that are distressing me, but their powerlessness.

And not only their powerlessness, but the friendliness behind it. For things that have been our close companions for a long while, such as watches, rings, necklaces, cigar-cases, although we refer to their inanimacy, surely must have some quality of warmth and devotion in excess of those that have just left the factory and no one has yet acquired! It would be treachery not to believe this.

This lost stick, now, which was taken by mis-

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take from a club stand a few weeks ago and has never been returned—I know that it wants me back as much as I want it. I know exactly what it would say had it a tongue.

“Take me back,” it would say—is saying all the time in its dumb way—to the miscreant who carried it off, “to my real master because he needs me and I need him. We belong to each other; he was my first owner ever since I came from Madagascar and was polished and ferruled and put in that shop in the Avenue de l’Opéra, where he bought me in 1919. I kept so straight for him, so strong and yet so light; and I had just the handle he likes, sloping upwards a little.

“We went everywhere together, first in Paris and then in Marseilles and all about there, up and down the noisy Cannebière; along the Corniche; he even took me on a boat to the Château d’If, and as far afield as Aix (to try and find Cézanne’s house); and then on a ship to the East. I went into SIMON ARZT’s (which every one calls Simon Artz’s) at Port Said, with him when he bought his first topee—not a very becoming one, I thought, but few men look well in topees—and I helped to support his steps under the heat of Aden, when he first wore the topee and was so much surprised when a dozen little black boys seized the side of the boat as it

The Lost Stick

reached the landing-stage and demanded a tip on the strength of its being Christmas Day, which we had completely forgotten. I was useful too in repulsing the same boys—or others, for they are all alike—as they followed us in a pack crying ‘Merry Christmas’ and holding out their impudent black hands.

“I was with him in Bombay, where however he walked little; and in Delhi, where in the early morning he walked much; and in Lucknow, where we went to the races and didn’t do so badly; and in the stifling streets of Benares among pilgrims and cows; and in Calcutta, where we went to the races again and lost all that Lucknow had provided, and more. Every evening just before sunset he took me to the Maidan and walked across the grass to the fort and back through the spicy golden haze.

“I was with him in the Malay States and had the inexpressible pride and delight of hearing him repudiate the offer of a Penang lawyer—by which I don’t mean a six-and-eightpenny legal adviser, but a local walking-stick of inferior quality. Nor did he, as most travellers do, bring away a Malacca cane, which I consider another proof of his nobility of character.

“I was with him when he ate his first mango-steen—that (as I heard him say) ecstatic moment in life.

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"I was with him when the police of Penang mistook him—"The man in the blue collar"—for an Anarchist on the occasion of the Governor's first visit to that exceedingly sultry spot, little thinking that, three or four days later, alighting from a special train at a station between Kwala Lumpur and Singapore, he was to be mistaken for the Governor himself (who had not been seen there) and saluted accordingly.

"And then came some more wretched sea, when I lay idle in a cabin and never touched his hand. And our next adventures were in Hong-Kong, where I was with him in the musky narrow streets, and on the top of the mountain which the funicular climbs at such a slope that all the houses seem to be falling down; and then again in Shanghai, where we walked for miles together through the real Chinese quarter.

"Then more sea—very rough this time—and we landed at Kobe, in Japan, and were inseparable again for a month, and for a week of it were high in the mountains, sometimes in the snow, walking hour after hour. I liked that. It was good after the cabin rack.

"I was with him on that windy ridge above Honolulu, where no matter how peaceful the day a tornado is always blowing. I was with him on the Waikiki beach, where the bathers ride on the crests of the waves on planks; but he did

The Lost Stick

not take me into the sea with him. I was with him in the Aquarium there, where the fish are so unlike all other fish and often so like people you know.

"And then came America, where I was almost the only walking-stick between the Pacific and the Atlantic. . . .

"And since then there have been two years in this England of ours, where the best walking of all is to be had. . . .

"But I have said enough. So now, my new owner—I cannot call you 'master'; that other one is my master—will you not take me back to the Club and give me to the Hall Porter, who has been waiting for me for weeks? Because you don't really like me as much as your old one—or if you do you are not worthy—and your old one probably is pining too. For we sticks can get fond of quite inferior persons. I don't say your stick is pining just as I am. That is unlikely, for no one could have such a master as mine, but he may be pining all the same."

That is what I like to think of my lost stick as saying.

THE DELIVERER

THE initial participants in the drama that I am about to release are a few strands of an aromatic and narcotic weed grown with great care in the State of Virginia; an ancient briar pipe; and a preparation of wood and phosphorus. These, some time in the forenoon of a hot Whit-Monday, were in the hands of a tramp who was resting beside the road on the edge of the common above a Surrey town that I will call Bramberley.

Having finished his repose he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and passed on. It must have been a few minutes later that I met him, although I had then no notion as to his share in the events that were to follow. Nor, to do him justice, had he. Indeed, unless he is among the readers of these lines, he will probably go down to his grave unaware that the dottle of his pipe, settling among the dry grass on a day when all was tinder, set it alight; so that, by the time I arrived, some square yards of heather and gorse and young brake fern were smouldering and crackling.

The Deliverer

My first impulse was to fling myself upon it; but I realised how futile would such an action be; the area was already too large for one opponent. I banged about a little, it is true, but to no purpose, and so went miserably and helplessly on my way, for there is something very sad about wanton destruction of any kind, but particularly the destruction of new growth so early in the year. It was depressing to think of those beautiful fronds fighting their way up through the sand and peat to spread out their green fingers—all in vain; to think of those vigorous gorse bushes now being reduced to blackness and sterility. Fire is the most terrible of destroyers.

Still, one man could do nothing. If I met anyone I would give the warning; but otherwise I was useless. Having come to this conclusion I passed on.

It was shortly after this that I came to the gates of a red-brick house, standing back, with a brass plate announcing it to be a school for the sons of gentlemen, and, loitering there, amid the warm fragrances from the garden, I was aware of such a dismal buzz as the sons of gentlemen can set up over exceedingly insipid lessons on a noon of great heat, when all the rest of the world is Bank-holidaying. For it is not the habit of schoolmasters to let their pupils off on

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the festivals of St. Lubbock—at any rate in the mornings.

Through the windows I caught sight, here and there, of a listless head. What lessons were in progress I cannot say, but as I stood there the old and not too deeply venerated name of HAMBLIN SMITH crossed my mind—for the first time for decades. Do they still acquire mathematics, I wondered, with the assistance of that formidable elucidator? And was there not one TODHUNTER? His name also I am sure I had not thought of for decades. The low murmur of education being acquired against the grain still went on; mingling with the sound of scales laboriously played in a more remote part of the premises.

Meanwhile the fire was burning. . . .

As I realised this, suddenly the real purpose of all these boys burst upon me. It was they, of course, who should extinguish it. Why I had not immediately thought of this I had no notion, unless the fierceness of the sun is to blame. But no sooner did I think of it than I advanced briskly to the front door and asked to see the head-master.

He came, and I explained.

There are head-masters who might demur to such an adventure; who would think prudently of burnt boot-soles and even of burnt hands and

The Deliverer

legs; who might have in the background a wife or matron of whom they stood in awe. I can conceive of such pedagogues. But this was of another breed. He was young and sporting.

"Of course," he said, "I'll have them out in no time. These fires break my heart."

He vanished, and I went outside to be ready to show the way.

Through one of the open windows I heard him giving his commands. "Now, boys," he said, "you've all got to help put out a heath fire. Each of you get a stick and leave his coat behind. We must beat all round the edges till it's out."

A wild cry resounded, followed by an avalanche of volunteers.

The same routine was enacted in the other rooms, and in a very few moments five-and-thirty sons of gentlemen, their masters and I, were on our way to the attack; and I can tell you they attacked with zeal.

It was nothing to them that the thermometer was exceeding all records. To me, however, it was; and I left them after a few minutes, for I was due at the next village for lunch.

But my philanthropic work was not yet done, for, as I passed the school again, what should once more smite upon my ears but the dreary cadences of scales. The musician had not been told! He alone remained a prisoner: a kind of

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inverted *Casabianca*: the one boy not privileged to be on the burning heath. I felt that it was impossible to pass on and leave him there out of all the fun. He would never forgive himself; nor should I me.

So, through the empty passages I tracked the doleful sound until the door of the practising room was reached and then I burst in.

His finger paused at C sharp, and he looked at me dazed.

"There's a fire on the heath," I said. "Down the road. All the rest of the school is there trying to put it out. You are to leave your coat behind and take a stick."

He was dazed no longer. He streaked from the room and in another minute or so the sons of gentlemen who were engaged on the beneficent task of extinguishment numbered thirty-and-six.

Alas, my poor HAMBLIN SMITH! Alas, my poor TODHUNTER! Alas, my poor CZERNY!

ON THE BORDERS OF PARIS

I. THE SADDEST HOUSE IN FRANCE

ONE should go to Malmaison only on a very fine day, for it is the saddest house in France, and the road to it, from Paris, runs through the dreariest of suburbs and the untidiest outskirts that a great city can have. You know those insubstantial inadequate cottages, unfinished villas called "Mon Abri" and "Le Nid," and neglected factories, among cabbages and hoardings, that the French specialise in; well, you see them most of the way. And the way is chiefly *pavé*, too!

In a car from the Place de la Concorde, say, the journey takes half an hour.

Not only is Malmaison sad, it is also the loneliest house I was ever in, or the house which most suggests loneliness. It is, in perfection, the house which a man furnishes and equips for a woman to whom he can no longer give love but to whom he is prepared to give everything else; the house, in perfection, in which a woman hopes against hope for a return of the old affection.

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True kindness would prompt such men (and perhaps does prompt them, but they lack the courage to comply) to cut the knot; false kindness makes them lavish money on Malmaisons.

Not that Malmaison was always like that. When Napoleon built it for the fascinating widow of the unfortunate Vicomte de Beauharnais, he adored her; but he must very soon have come to realise his mistake—certainly not, poor creature, without assistance from her, for her extravagances became almost insane, and her frivolity was never too consistent with the position of First Consul's wife, to say nothing, later, of that of an Empress. It was, however, neither foolishness nor wastefulness that brought about her downfall: it was her inability, in the French phrase, to "put into the world" a little Napoleon. She had borne Beauharnais a son, but she could not oblige the Emperor in the same way, and he was implacable. And so, in 1809, came the divorce, and in the stables you may see the famous coach, the "Opal," immensely high and swaying, in which (with the letter N on the panels) the unhappy lady was driven back to Malmaison after the decree. What a journey—and what a house to come back to after it! For the rest of her exile, which amounted in fact to disgrace, she was to see at every turn nothing

On the Borders of Paris

but evidences of her lost place and splendour, nothing but the letter N wherever she looked.

For although it was nominally Josephine's house, Napoleon is everywhere, in monograms, in portraiture and in symbol. Even the garden is dominated by a gigantic marble head of the overman. Even the rooms which are called Josephine's and were appropriated to her, are Napoleon's in fact. But if she could easily have too much of his assertive inventive personality, we cannot; and, to me, the Napoleonic museum which occupies a big upper room is the most interesting part of the château. One comes very near the great little man in this room, and once again—as at the Invalides, at the Carnavalet, at Fontainebleau—is in a position to appreciate his thoroughness and ingenuity. The high quality of workmanship on which he insisted is apparent on every hand, particularly in his campaign accessories, his sets of toilet articles, his writing case, his candle case. Everything was made to fold into the smallest possible space. And he thought of everything—even a silk screen, light green in hue, with a weighted top, which could be suspended from the mantelpiece of whatever room he was in to protect him from a fire that was too hot or too brilliant. And on a hook hangs one of the gold watches which the illus-

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trious Louis Abraham Breguet built for him.

Nothing could make the house anything but sad. Its French formality is sad; the custodians at the gate, surrounded by picture post cards, the gravel approach, the inhumanity of the garden—all are sad. And then the memories, the lifelessness, the furniture not used, the books (Napoleon's own, returned to their old shelves by generous collectors) not opened, the fascinating folding desk in the library not written at, the rich noble curtains not drawn, Josephine's harp for ever silent.

Josephine's harp! Anyone who has been to the Musée Grévin, Paris's wax-work exhibition, knows that harp, or its facsimile, standing in the large group called a Soirée at Malmaison. This tableau was arranged by Frédéric Masson, the historian of the Napoleonic era, who once, in effigy, was seated in a corner surveying his handiwork but has latterly disappeared, either because he was disintegrating or (dare I suggest it?) because his figure was needed for reincarnation as somebody else, a more immediate hero or villain of the day. Anyway, it had gone when I was in the Musée Grévin a few months ago. Well, that representation of the hall of Malmaison is, to my mind, almost a justification of wax-works, so capable is it of suggesting the actual

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scene and revivifying the past. But at the château itself, Josephine's harp is, with Napoleon's card table, in the music *salon*; and looking upon that lovely mute instrument one seems to be nearer its ill-starred player. One realises too what a loss the dignity and charm of drawing-rooms suffered when the harp became obsolete. And, also, what a loss to women with beautiful arms.

Poor Josephine died in 1814. A year later her lord, master and repudiator was again at Malmaison, for five days, a captive, on his way from Waterloo to St. Helena. Five bitterer days probably no man ever spent. And now St. Helena has come to Malmaison, for in one of the rooms, brought from Longwood, is the bed he died on, with Ary Scheffer's painting of the scene over it. Time's revenges, Time's symmetrical irony, if you like!

II. VILLE D'AVRAY

"When next you are in Paris," said a lady at dinner, "be sure to go to Cabassud's. For lunch. It is a delicious place."

"Cabassud's?"

"Yes. At Ville d'Avray. You sit and eat in little arbours."

And at once there floated through my mind

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a single detached line from one of the *Proverbs*
in *Porcelain*—

April, Ville d'Avray, Ma'amselle Rose,

—the only line I have retained.

That was months ago, but I remembered the name, and when I was next in Paris I went out to the little courtly village of white houses and chestnut trees, bent not only on finding Cabassud but also the Corot monument, for it was at Ville d'Avray that Corot lived.

As it happens, Corot and Cabassud are side by side, on the edge of a little *étang*: one of the two *étangs*—the other is across the road—which he painted so often, again and again, under different effects of light, all his life. His admirers may think of him as searching France for these placid meres in which the sky is reflected so tenderly and with such lustre; but they are wrong. The frugal old boy, frugal only to be kind, knew a trick worth two of that. All he did was to leave his house, a few steps away, and find his subjects here, within reach of lunch at home; and it is fitting that his fine great head, benign and simple, in stone, set up in homage by many friends, should be here, so near the water and the reeds that he loved; fitting also that in the decorative border above it should be a lark singing, for it was as

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a lark that, in a famous passage, Corot once symbolised himself: a lark singing his little songs in a quiet sky, in contradistinction to some contemporary—I forget which one—who was an eagle. Delacroix probably.

Whether any other artists are painting at Ville d'Avray to-day I cannot say; but I can say that a certain craftsman in clay has made it his home, for, greatly daring, I pushed open the unlatched door of his studio, under the impression that it might be a house to let (looking over houses to let being an amusement that never palls), and there I found arrays of exquisitely shaped little vases and bowls in soft neutral hues, and two or three potter's wheels, and vessels containing liquid of every colour of the prism. The potter himself was absent, and it was perhaps just as well; for I have no French to explain trespass in.

I heard afterwards, from one of Cabassud's friendly waiters, that he was a Russian refugee. Should by any chance these words meet his eyes, I hope he will accept my apology. "Gently, potter, gently, pray."

A few minutes later I had another thrill—for this was a red-letter day indeed.

It is curious how seldom, even if one haunts rivers for the purpose, one sees a kingfisher: I mean those of us who want to see them, who

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think there is no bird more exciting. Others see them often. I have a friend who composes music in a little summer house beside the Thames, and one Sunday morning while he was at work a kingfisher flew into the room, and in attempting to fly out again crashed against the window, so that the musician had to nurse it back to consciousness. But I doubt if he really valued the privilege; I think he looked upon it as an interruption. Another friend of mine, a biologist, complained that a kingfisher had swooped on his little pool of goldfish and carried them off. Complained! And the rural postman once told me where young kingfishers could be seen every morning at play—half a dozen of them—but his voice had no emotion in it as he told me, and when I went to the place there were none. Nor were there any when, recently, I walked beside the Test at Stockbridge, or beside the Avon at Fordingbridge, or beside the Itchen at Winchester.

It began to seem, indeed, as if none but the unadventurous achieved the fair, until at Ville d'Avray, as I stood between the two lakes, a kingfisher flashed by, my first for years. Only for a moment. It flashed across my vision for only a moment—burning, beautiful—and was gone; but I had seen it.

And Cabassud's?

On the Borders of Paris

Why is it that in France eating in the open air is a refined art, while in England it is almost always repulsive? Think of the horrors of restaurants that cater for day trippers here, and then contrast them with the comfort and distinction of Cabassud's, where one sits and eats in arbours, just as my informant said, and everything is clean and comely and efficient. Although it was as late as October, there was a huge dish of *fraises de bois*, and a huge dish of *framboises*, with concomitant cream, enough for every one, and the service was quick. And all the while I was eating I was peering through the trees for another glimpse of darting blue, but it never came. Next spring, if I get to Paris, I shall go to Cabassud's again, full of new hope, and I advise every sojourner in the French capital to do the same. Let our motto be—

April, Ville d'Avray. . . .

Yes, and why not a Ma'amselle Rose?

THE SNOWBALL

WHAT," said he, "am I to do about this?" and he handed me a flimsy sheet of paper, typewritten, with a long list of names on it, each joined by the word "to." The last two names were written by hand, the last of all being his own. At the foot of the names were these instructions:—

"GOOD LUCK.

Copy this in full and send to nine friends to whom you wish good luck.

This chain, started by an American officer, should go round the world three times.

Do not break this chain, for whoever does will have bad luck.

Do it within twenty-four hours and count nine days.

You will then have some great fortune.

Remember, if you believe it, it is so."

I handed it back.

"But you don't say what I am to do with it," he said.

The Snowball

"It's a matter on which advice is useless," I replied. "If you believe in it, you will at once sit down and try to think of nine friends to whom you wish good luck. It's a large number, it's almost a prohibitive number, but you'll try. Then, having collected them, you'll copy the thing out nine times and send it off. Because you're superstitious and you want a bit of good luck; even more, because you don't want bad luck. But if you don't believe in it, you'll fling it in the waste-paper basket."

"I don't think I could destroy it," he said. "Suppose it's true. How could I dare to break the chain?"

"Then copy it out nine times and dispatch it," I said. "But within twenty-four hours."

"I'm horribly busy to-day," he replied.

"Then throw it away and forget it," I said.

"I simply daren't do that," he said. "It would break the chain and bring me bad luck. Wouldn't it be all right if I waited till Sunday?"

I pointed out that it must be done within twenty-four hours.

"What a nuisance!" he said. "But Heaven knows I could do with a 'great fortune.'"

"Then go without lunch and think of nine friends," I said.

"Oh, I couldn't go without lunch," he replied. "I depend on lunch."

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"Here, let me tear it up," I said, extending a hand.

His face blanched. "I couldn't," he said. "I should never forgive myself. Just think of something wonderful happening before the end of nine days. What would you do if you were in my place?" he asked.

"Me?" I said. "I should throw it in the waste-paper basket. I can't be bothered with superstition."

And so I left him.

The next morning I received a letter in his handwriting and discovered that he had been base enough to send one of his nine copies to me. My first impulse was to throw it in the waste-paper basket, but something checked me and I read it once more:—

"GOOD LUCK.

Copy this in full and send to nine friends to whom you wish good luck.

This chain, started by an American officer, should go round the world three times.

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Do it within twenty-four hours and count nine days.

You will then have some great fortune.

Remember, if you believe it, it is so."

The Snowball

Who on earth is this American officer? I thought. Is he a fanatic or a practical joker? Is he a friend of the Post Office—the P.M.G. himself, in masquerade, perhaps?

I began to do a little arithmetic—with astonishing results. If, for example, I were to sit down to-day and send off my nine copies, and each of the nine recipients did the same, and no one in the chain failed, by next Monday 6,330,969 copies of the thing would be in circulation, and the same number of persons assured of great fortune. This figure, I must say, shook me a good deal, because there can't be so much good fortune in the world. This isn't really a lucky planet, you know.

And so I approached the waste-paper basket again.

And then I remembered that so many people would fail to respond, that perhaps the run on the bank of fortune might not be so serious after all, and there would be more for those who complied.

But could any piece of luck recompense one for the dreary task of copying out anything nine times?

And had I the courage to let nine of my friends know that I went in for this kind of foolishness?

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And who were the nine friends to be? Most of my friends have too much good luck as it is.

I wondered if the winner of the Calcutta Sweep had copied out nine of these forms.

What kind of "great fortune" was I most needing? *A* great fortune, of course. But the words here were "some great fortune" which seemed to cut out money. If the American officer had written "some fortune" it would be more comforting. Still, fortune is fortune.

I began to jot down the names of a few friends, but not one of them would do. They would all think my mind was giving way.

Meanwhile my work was being neglected. Really this kind of thing wasn't fair. No one had any right to butt into other people's lives with this rubbish about breaking chains and bad luck. No one wants bad luck, of course, but unsettling nine of one's friends was beyond a joke. I, at any rate, would not add to the nuisance. I reached out towards the waste-paper basket again.

And yet——

OFF THE LINE

I WAS writing recently about trains, not wholly to their credit. For the pleasure of penning that indictment I have had, of course, to pay, since the bill for every luxury inevitably comes in. Within a week a train let me down. It was, during half a century of travelling, my first railway accident, and it was a very slight one; but none the less, I don't want another. It was sufficiently disturbing to indicate how grave a mischief to the nervous system, even when unaccompanied by bodily ills, a railway accident might be.

The train, a crowded one, started to time, and for half an hour ran along through the night gaily enough; and then we were made aware by detonations that a fog enveloped us. A few minutes later, with the suddenness that must be one of the worst characteristics of these occurrences, there was a grinding of brakes, we were flung about in our places, the springs vanished from beneath the seats, the carriage settled down several inches on one side, and we stopped dead.

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Since untoward events always lead to promiscuous conversation, every one at once began to talk to every one else. The company in my carriage consisted of an old man who smoked cheroots so furiously and so short that you would have said that his white beard was made of asbestos fibre; next him a Scotchman; next the Scotchman a facetious coast-guard with a row of four medals; and next the coast-guard a female friend with the biggest wedding ring I ever saw, protected by two equally massive keepers. These were all on the side opposite mine. On my side was a city man facing the asbestos beard; then a clerk and his friends; and then, in the corner facing the coast-guard's female friend, the writer of this history. Hitherto we had been more or less occupied with our papers; but now all barriers were burned away, we came as brothers and sisters and settled down to tell our neighbours, our *vis-à-vis*, and the compartment in general, that we were off the line.

A railway accident not only predisposes every one to friendly intercourse, but it promotes the habit of saying everything several times.

"We're off the line," we said. "We must be off the line." "I'll bet you we're off the line." "Oh, yes, not a doubt about it, we're off the line." Investigators who had been leaning out

Off the Line

of the windows corroborated. "We're off the line. We're a foot away from it this side. Another yard or so and we should have fallen over." "It's too foggy to see much, but there's no doubt we're off the line."

"I felt sure we were off the line," said asbestos beard. "I knew it by the list to port," said the coast-guard. "We shall want that port soon," said one of the clerks; "I could do with a drop now." "We shall be here all night," said the coast-guard. "All night! Oh, what will Dad say?" exclaimed his female friend. "They'll put an engine on the back," said asbestos beard, "and pull us on the line again." "You can't do that," said the city man; "the rails are destroyed. They'll have to be relaid." "No, you can't do that," said one of the clerks; "we'll have to get out and walk." "If we have to get out," said asbestos beard, "some one must help me. I'm nearly blind." "Whatever will Dad say?" exclaimed the female friend.

"Why the dickens," asked one of the investigators at the windows, "doesn't the guard come and tell us what has happened and what we're in for? It's a scandal." This, by the way, was the first hint of any acerbity; and that was only a hint. Slight railway accidents, it seems, do not make people cross, even though long and chilly delays result; slight railway accidents

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make people voluble and philosophic. "Of course he ought to," said asbestos beard; and we all agreed: "Of course he ought to." "But these fellows are no good in emergencies," the Scotchman said. "No, they're all right so long as things are all right," said asbestos beard, "but directly anything goes wrong they're hopeless." "That's right; they lose their heads." "Yes, they lose their heads."

We then passed to the question of where we were. "I'd get out and walk if I knew where we were," said the city man; "but where are we?" "Yes, that's the question, where are we?" "Well, it's perfectly absurd not to be told. That rotten guard ought to tell us." "They're raking out the engine fires now," said one of the investigators. "We're off the line right enough," he added. "I said we were off the line," said asbestos beard. "Look at the list to port," said the coast-guard. "I can't think what Dad'll be thinking," said the female friend.

The tendency to say the same thing several times having a little abated, the Scotchman, who had been much at sea, told stories of accidents on ships, and asbestos beard told us of the days when he was a consul in the Pacific; and this reminded the coast-guard of the extraordinary variety and goodness and cheap-

Off the Line

ness of fish in some of these places. "A fish weighing ten to fifteen pounds costs tuppence at Aden," he said. "There's nothing in the world," said asbestos beard, "to beat the flavour of a pomfret."

Somewhere at this point I went to sleep—awaking to find that rescue had arrived, for I was aware of an official at the door bidding us to descend and climb into the carriages still on the line in the rear of the train, and be pulled back to the next junction; and with difficulty this feat was performed—difficulty due to the height of the step above the ground, and the darkness, and the signal wires, but alleviated by the willingness with which others offered their help, and particularly the coast-guard, who added gallantry to assistance, and was heard at neighbouring doors assuring the ladies that it was safest to leap into his arms. And so, in a ghostly procession, we filed along to other compartments, lugging our bags through what seemed to be a cabbage field, and in course of time were pulled away from the scene and so—two hours overdue—gained haven.

I had climbed into the guard's van, and I spent the rest of the journey there, and there I learnt the reason—and a very good one—why the guard had not been parading the train and reassuring us. He was otherwise and more

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usefully engaged, for directly he realised the worst he had filled his pockets with fog signals and had gone back on the line for as much as three-quarters of a mile, fixing them so as to stop other trains from careering on their way full into us: a contingency that we all had had rather too vividly in mind.

I came away with a new first-hand idea of the cheeriness which my countrymen when collected in any numbers and among strangers can display under danger and inconvenience, and also with an added respect for the railway's *personnel* and organisation. There must be something very remarkable in a system which can deal quickly with such a serious complexity as a derailed engine and coach on so busy a main line as this—at night, and in a fog.

So far the incident may be described as a comedy. But there was tragedy in it too, for what of the unfortunate man who had let us in for all this muddle—the man who had run past the signal and over the points? “Will the engine-driver get into trouble?” I asked the guard. “Yuss,” he said; “it’s the end of him.” “And do you have to make a report?” I asked. “Yuss,” he said; “a good hour’s writing before I see my bed to-night.” A fellow-author.

PROGRESS

ROBBINS and I were playing a round and approaching the second hole. It was just as Robbins was applying his brassie that one of the new Committee-men passed. New Committee-men are often incapable of not assuming airs, and this one was like that. He paused to watch the stroke, and little Robbins, either from incapacity or nervousness, grounded the club so effectively that a large piece of turf flew into the air.

Humbled and vexed, he was for a moment motionless. Doubtless he had been on the point of following up the clod and retrieving it, but before he could do so the new Committee-man, mistaking delay for carelessness and wishing to exercise authority, made the replacing of divots the subject of a homily.

One of the most stringent rules of all golf clubs, he said. What would become of golf clubs if divots were left about? The obligation of a player was to remedy the defect immediately. Nothing should intervene between the blunder and the correction of it; and so forth.

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Poor little Robbins, dazed by so much rhetoric and perplexed by receiving instruction in a duty which he had had no kind of intention of avoiding, made no reply. He replaced the divot in silence, and we walked on.

But his mind thenceforth was no more on the game; it was on the new Committee-man and his officiousness.

"Did you ever hear anything like it," he asked, "speaking to a fellow-member like that? More than speaking to him—ordering him about. In another minute I should have let him know what I thought of him. As if I wasn't aware of the rule about replacing divots. Every child knows it. As if I should dream of leaving it there."

Now and then we caught up other players and they too had to hear the story. Gradually, little Robbins evolved some of the things that he would have said had he had more time to think, or had he not been so petrified by surprise.

"In another minute," he said, "I should have told him to mind his own business. The time to speak about replacing divots was after the player had gone on without doing so; clever men (I should have said) are rarely officious. Some men are not fit to be trusted with authority: it goes to their little heads."

The more sympathy he received the more

Progress

scathing little Robbins became in the retorts which the new Committee-man had only just missed.

"What I was on the point of saying when he left," he said, "was that there are more important things for Committee-men to do than standing about on the links putting men off their stroke. 'Never mind about the turf,' I should have said. 'Get back to the club-house and try to make the waiting a little better. We'll look after the divots if you'll look after the walnut pickles.' That would have been a nasty one for him. There have been no walnut pickles for a fortnight. The beef too—I'm sure it's not English. 'While I'm replacing the divots perhaps you'll do something about replacing foreign meat with home-grown.' I nearly said that."

"What would you do," I heard him ask old Satterthwaite, "if a new Committee-man ordered you to replace a divot—and when you were just about to do it, too?"

"What should I do?" old Satterthwaite replied. "I should give him a piece of my mind, of course, and if he continued to be insulting I should knock him down."

"Yes," said little Robbins, "that's how I felt. In fact I very nearly did it."

And so we gradually finished the round and prepared for lunch. As it happened—but more

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by design on my part than pure chance—we did not sit together; but afterwards I found myself in an adjacent armchair with its back to the group in which little Robbins, still eloquent on the same subject, was holding forth.

“Such a remark as that—such busybody interference—coming from a new Committee-man—a mushroom—was more than I could stand. ‘Look here,’ I said, ‘that’s not the way to address members of the club. You jolly well mind your own business. You’re too officious; and clever men are never officious. I’m afraid,’ I said, ‘that authority’s gone to your poor little head.’”

Some one whistled his astonishment.

“I did,” little Robbins affirmed, “and more too. I told him he could be better employed looking after the club-house than hanging about the course. I got in a nasty one about walnut pickles and foreign beef. ‘Why don’t you see we have walnut pickles?’” I said.

“And what did he say?” some one asked.

“He? Nothing. Just looked foolish. I felt almost sorry for him. ‘Look here,’ I said finally, ‘I’m talking to you for your good. You’re new to the job and it’s too much for you. Take a piece of advice from a friend: Go slow—or jolly well go to Hades!’ That’s how I ended: ‘or jolly well go to Hades!’”

SCENTS

IT has, I believe, been decided by expert arboriculturists that the plane is the ideal tree for cities. But I wish they could have been favourable to the lime, for the lime is always beautiful, and for two or three weeks in July it diffuses an enchanting perfume; and of perfumes cities are much in need. London, indeed, if it were not for wallflowers and stocks in the beds in our open spaces, an occasional florist's shop, and a few coffee roasters here and there, would do nothing estimable for the nose at all. And the coffee roasters should be more numerous. There is one at the corner of Vere Street, one in Piccadilly, one opposite the Law Courts; but even these roast capriciously and do not publish the hours in the morning papers, as they ought to. Coffee roasting should be among "Arrangements for To-day."

Why the nose is so neglected is a mystery. The ear is being constantly tickled both with words and music; for the eye almost too much is done, with spectacular games, pageants, plays, and films; but nothing organised is done for the

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one could make a list. Rupert Brooke made one in one of his poems; but it was not exhaustive. I know what mine would contain, even if it failed to include all. Sweet-briar in the air, so vague and elusive that search cannot trace the source. Pine trees in the air on a hot day. Lime blossoms in the air. ("Such a noisy smell!" as a small child said, thinking of the murmur of bees that always accompanies it.) Brake fern crushed. Walnut leaves crushed. Mint sauce. Newly split wood in a copse. Any kind of gardener's rubbish fire. An un-smoked briar pipe. Cinnamon. Ripe apples. Tea just opened. Coffee just ground. A racing stable. A dairy farm. A shrubbery of box. Cedar pencils. Cigars in the box. A hot day on the South Downs when a light wind brings the thyme with it. The under side of a turf. A circus.

And I have said nothing of flowers!

NAMES

I. NUANCES OF FICTION

IT was my privilege the other evening to be consulted by a novelist of eminence as to what he should call certain characters in his new story, and anyone listening to our discussion could never again adopt Juliet's lighthearted attitude with regard to the significance of names. "What's in a name?" is a question that may be scoffingly asked on a balcony in Verona; but in my friend's study in London the problem becomes acute. Then, there is everything in a name.

This is the kind of thing that happened.

"I've got a girl in my new book," he said, "about twenty-two, modern, pretty, mischievous, with red hair. Tall and slender. What shall I call her?"

"Many modern girls are called Peggy or Betty," I said, after long and careful thought.

"She's not so frivolous as that."

"Well, then, Nancy?"

"No, she's not Nancy; she dresses too well."

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"Clive?" I queried. "There are lots of Olives now."

"Didn't I mention that her hair is red?"

"Very well, then, Anne."

"No, Anne's impossible. I know an Anne."

"What about Eleanor?"

"Didn't I say she was mischievous? Eleanors are never mischievous."

"Sheila is coming into fashion," I said.

"Sheila's impossible in this case. The girl's a Nonconformist minister's daughter."

"You never told me that," I replied testily.

"Really I must have the complete *dossier* if I'm to be of any use."

"Very well, then," he said, "she hasn't got a dimple."

"Why do you tell me that?" I asked.

"To help you," he said. "It would make a difference. If she has a dimple you can't call her Matilda, for example, or Martha. And if her hair is bobbed you can't call her Godiva. Unless the book is illustrated, the name must paint a portrait too. Her hair is not bobbed."

"What do you say to Winnie?" I asked.

"Impossible. She's too tall."

"Then Clarice?"

"No, not with red hair."

"What about Posy?"

"Posy is for a smaller woman altogether.

Names

Something to pet. This girl is rather frightening."

"Oh, frightening, is she? Very well then, Pauline."

"No, not so impressive as that."

"Agatha, then?"

"I ask you," he said scornfully, "would an Agatha be pretty? She might be statuesque or beautiful, but not pretty."

I suggested Elspeth.

"No, that's Scotch. She's very English."

"Very well then, Nesta."

"I can't use Nesta. I know a Nesta."

"Violet? It could be shortened to Vi."

"No, I know a Violet."

"But does that matter?" I asked.

"It matters very much. This isn't my first novel, remember. One has to be very careful."

"What about Margot?"

"Absolutely impossible."

"I can't think of any more names," I said.

"Oh, yes, Dorothy."

"I know a Dorothy."

"You know too many women," I said.

"I do," he admitted.

"What about Jocelyn?" I asked.

"I rather like that," he said. "Yes, Jocelyn isn't bad. Yes, we'll fix it at Jocelyn. You've been very useful to me; do you mind helping me

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with a man now? I've got a man—the hero, in fact. Good-looking, dark, serious, fastidious.”

“John,” I said at once.

“No, not quite John. He’s John all right up to a point, but after that he breaks away into something less solid, less honourable, less normal.”

“Henry?” I suggested.

“No, not Henry. Some of him is Henry, but not much. He is rather too modern.”

“What about Eustace?”

“No, he’s better than that. More human.”

“Leonard?”

“Isn’t Leonard a little affected?”

“Perhaps so,” I said; “but not so much so as Marmaduke.”

“Then why drag Marmaduke in?” he asked sharply. “This is a serious matter, you know.”

I expressed contrition. “How do you like Maurice?” I inquired.

“I know a Maurice.”

“Or Edgar?”

“No, not suitable at all.”

“Gerard?”

“I know a Gerard.”

“You might dodge the difficulty by giving him a surname, as a Christian name,” I suggested; “such as, for instance, Grantley. His friends could call him Grant.”

Names

"That's not a bad idea," he said. "Yes, I think I'll adopt that."

So if you come across a new novel in the autumn with the hero named Grantley and a girl named Jocelyn in it, you will know whom to thank.

But I assure you I was glad to get the matter settled. What's in a name, indeed!

II. WITCHES

I have never written a story about a witch, and therefore I have never been called upon to give a witch a name; but I am wondering now what sort of name I should have chosen. As a matter of fact, witches in stories are not named; they are just "the witch" or "the old witch." Take, for instance, *The Tinder Box*, by Hans Christian Andersen—the witch there, who put the soldier in the way of fortune and was treated so discourteously and ungratefully by him in return, even to the severance of her head from her body, is nameless. So is the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*. But, as I have just discovered, witches in England and Scotland, of whom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a profusion, all had names, and very surprising names too, not in the least, in most cases, such as we associate to-day with their peculiar calling.

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Whenever I see a photographer skipping about with his camera in public places to-day, collecting "left to rights," I feel that he is an intruder. But if a photographer could have been busy among these necromancers in the sixteenth century, the results would now be very interesting. A picture of Joyce Boanes I should value. Who could paint her, among living artists? I can think only of Mr. Rackham.

We know too little of witches. Did they marry wizards? I see no reason why they should, and it is a mistake for husband and wife to be in the same line of business. Moreover, conjurers don't marry conjuresses; nor, so far as I am aware, could they, for conjuresses do not exist. Why not is a mystery, for women should conjure very well: they have pretty hands, and do not have to roll up their sleeves. Also, they can talk glibly—or so it is rumoured.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

HE was at the very head of the long row of cabs that were waiting for the express to come in at Waterloo. But in his case pride of place meant alas! nothing, for he drove a four-wheeler, and all the others were taxis, and people who arrive by express are in a hurry to get away.

There, however, he sat, hoping probably against hope, while behind him extended half a mile of the vehicles which have made him obsolete.

Having still some time to wait before the train that I was meeting arrived, I was able to watch him. He was a little old man, short and brisk, with white hair and a lined face. All cabmen have suddenly become old, but whereas advanced age strikes one as odd on the box of a taxi—such modern machinery seeming to demand youth—it goes fittingly enough, and always has done so, with growlers. What all these old taxi-drivers did before they took to their present occupation I can't say: it is a problem where they come from and how they spent their distant

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juvenescence; but the venerable driver at Waterloo was always a driver. I asked him and he told me so, but I had guessed it first.

When the express arrived he galvanised his horse and began to make alluring signs and sounds as the passengers emerged; but one and all repulsed him.

"No, no, I want a taxi," was the steady reply.

He took it very well—he must indeed have been used to it—but as taxi after taxi filled up and moved away he began to show signs of dejection. He left the box and made direct frontal attacks on the more likely looking people: an old-fashioned lady, for example, who to his eye would be suspicious of all novel inventions, but whom he totally misread, for she made a bee-line for her own car; and then a schoolboy with a bicycle, upon which he laid a detaining hand preparatory to lifting it on the roof. To the old cabman the boy looked weak and pliable: a little bold address would capture him; but again he was psychologically astray. The boy, probably for the past hour, had been anticipating his taxi ride and he shook off his detainer with impatience.

At last the platform had emptied and the four-wheeler was left alone.

It was then that I went over for a chat.

"They seem to prefer petrol," I said.

The Human Touch

He grunted assent.

"I don't see how you can make it pay," I said.

"We couldn't if people weren't kind," he replied. "They're sorry for us. They look at the old horse and they look at me, and they take us on out of pity."

"Is there so much compassion as that?" I asked. "I'm surprised. But I'm glad to hear it."

"And sentiment too," he said. "That's why I come to Waterloo. People arrive here from Africa and Australia, you know—old Colonists coming home again—and they've been thinking about the London they used to know and particularly about hansoms and four-wheelers, and when they see me they fairly cry sometimes. 'We must have another ride in a four-wheeler,' they say, 'just for the sake of old times.' And they're not mean when they get to the other end, either.

"And then there are lovers—they like us too. We're not in a hurry. And what with these and a few very wet days, when people don't mind what they ride in—a hearse, if it was waterproof—we just manage. But to-day's an unlucky one. Look at that sun shining! And there's no big boat in at Southampton to-day either."

"Still," I said, "it is spring, and this is the lovers' season. Don't despair yet."

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"I never despair," he replied. "But it's weary work waiting."

"Well," I said, "I must go. My train's due." And I went off to another arrival platform and met the twins and their mother.

The twins took each a hand and advanced to the gate by leaps and bounds.

"What are we going to do?" they asked excitedly; "are we going to the Zoo?"

"If you like," I said.

"Directly—before lunch?"

"Yes."

"And after lunch?"

"During lunch," I said, "we shall study the advertisements and see which is the best *matinée* and we'll go to that."

They sprang into the air, for they have been well brought up and these excursions are sufficiently rare to be raptures almost beyond control.

"But first," I said, after we were free from the ticket collector, "I have a special experience for you. I want you to know what travelling about London used to be like when your mother was a child and I was a young man. So as a very particular treat we are going to the Zoo in a growler."

"A growler!" they exclaimed. "Oh, how divine!"

OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS

I. THE POWER OF THE PRESS

THE birds were busily flying to and fro with feathers and moss, wool and horsehair, which they were weaving into their nests, unperturbed by any of those threats of strikes upon which the building trade of this country seems to do so well. All were active except the robin's wife, who sat idle and forlorn on a spray of a blackthorn.

"What's the matter?" asked a passing thrush. "Why aren't you building too? Had a row with your architect?"

"Not exactly," said the robin's wife; "my husband's a little difficult, that's all. He won't accept any site that I suggest, and I know plenty: safe, too, or as nearly safe as anything can be in a world of boys. Quite a lot within a few yards from this spot. But it's all useless; he goes his own way, and this year nothing seems to satisfy him. He's off prospecting now."

"I should have thought you'd have taken one of those nest boxes in the Manor garden," said

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the thrush. "They're just the thing for robins and wrens and tits and little people like that. Too small for me, even if I cared to be shut up."

"Oh, no," said the robin; "my husband wouldn't hear of it. I did make the suggestion."

"Yet you'd have all the safety you want," said the thrush. "It may be a little mechanical living under housing-scheme rules; but you know where you are from day to day, which is more than a thrush does. Our nests are so conspicuous! But it beats me," he went on, "why your husband doesn't accept your views. You robins, of course, are absurdly alike, but if you're the one I'm thinking of, you've been a good wife to him. You've brought up a few families round here, haven't you?"

"Yes," said the robin.

"It wasn't you," the thrush asked with a searching look, "who had the young cuckoo last year?"

"No, thank Heaven," said the robin. "I've known a lot of trouble, but nothing as bad as that."

"And yet I feel sure I know your face," the thrush continued. "Why, of course," he exclaimed, "I remember now! It was you who had the nest in the station-master's old top hat last spring?"

"Yes," said the robin. "And the year before
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in the old lady's letter-box, and the year before that in the pocket of the gamekeeper's old coat."

"Bless my soul!" said the other, "you do go it. We thrushes don't indulge in fancy tricks like that. Just the regular old holly-bush or the hedge for us, and the same old mud lining for our nests all our days. But you robins, you're so novel, so adventurous. Why, there was a pair round here who worked a ten-shilling note into their nest one year."

"That was us too," the robin admitted, blushing a deeper red in her pride. "But that's the whole trouble. You see it's made my husband so ambitious. We got into the papers and it went to his head. Nothing will do now but another sensation. After being in the papers three years running he's mad to get noticed again. You know the kind of thing:—

'ROBIN BUILDS IN TALL HAT.'

'ANOTHER FREAK NEST.

ROBIN BRINGS UP BROOD IN LETTER-BOX.

HUMANE POSTMAN'S DILEMMA.'

'ROBIN'S NEST BLOCKS STOVE-PIPE.'

'WHERE DID THE BRADBURY GO?

ASK THE ROBINS.'

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"I never despair," he replied. "But it's weary work waiting."

"Well," I said, "I must go. My train's due." And I went off to another arrival platform and met the twins and their mother.

The twins took each a hand and advanced to the gate by leaps and bounds.

"What are we going to do?" they asked excitedly; "are we going to the Zoo?"

"If you like," I said.

"Directly—before lunch?"

"Yes."

"And after lunch?"

"During lunch," I said, "we shall study the advertisements and see which is the best *matinée* and we'll go to that."

They sprang into the air, for they have been well brought up and these excursions are sufficiently rare to be raptures almost beyond control.

"But first," I said, after we were free from the ticket collector, "I have a special experience for you. I want you to know what travelling about London used to be like when your mother was a child and I was a young man. So as a very particular treat we are going to the Zoo in a growler."

"A growler!" they exclaimed. "Oh, how divine!"

OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS

I. THE POWER OF THE PRESS

THE birds were busily flying to and fro with feathers and moss, wool and horsehair, which they were weaving into their nests, unperturbed by any of those threats of strikes upon which the building trade of this country seems to do so well. All were active except the robin's wife, who sat idle and forlorn on a spray of a blackthorn.

"What's the matter?" asked a passing thrush. "Why aren't you building too? Had a row with your architect?"

"Not exactly," said the robin's wife; "my husband's a little difficult, that's all. He won't accept any site that I suggest, and I know plenty: safe, too, or as nearly safe as anything can be in a world of boys. Quite a lot within a few yards from this spot. But it's all useless; he goes his own way, and this year nothing seems to satisfy him. He's off prospecting now."

"I should have thought you'd have taken one of those nest boxes in the Manor garden," said

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the thrush. "They're just the thing for robins and wrens and tits and little people like that. Too small for me, even if I cared to be shut up."

"Oh, no," said the robin; "my husband wouldn't hear of it. I did make the suggestion."

"Yet you'd have all the safety you want," said the thrush. "It may be a little mechanical living under housing-scheme rules; but you know where you are from day to day, which is more than a thrush does. Our nests are so conspicuous! But it beats me," he went on, "why your husband doesn't accept your views. You robins, of course, are absurdly alike, but if you're the one I'm thinking of, you've been a good wife to him. You've brought up a few families round here, haven't you?"

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"My husband's simply potty about those headlines, and no ordinary site need apply any more. I don't believe he'd have a nest and a family at all if there was no publicity attached to it. He must have publicity. He thinks only in terms of advertisement now."

She sighed. "We used to be much happier in the old days," she said, "when we built in the bank and were friends with the gardeners and the wood-cutters. But my husband won't look at a gardener or a wood-cutter any more. All he wants is journalists."

It was at this moment that the old bird flew back.

"It's all right, my dear," he said, with a nod to the thrush. "I've done it again. You know the house on the edge of the golf links, with the old arbour in the garden? Well, it's just changed hands, and there's an old forgotten pair of boots on the arbour shelf that were absolutely made for us. You can have which you like, right or left," he added, with all a husband's magnanimity; "I leave the choice entirely to you."

"But isn't that rather risky?" his wife asked. "Supposing some one takes the boots away?"

"They won't," said her husband. "The new tenant doesn't move in for three weeks and by that time it wouldn't matter if we were discovered. We shall have gone too far. In fact I

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hope we shall be. And then"—he flapped his wings in triumph—"then we'll get a good notice again."

"You seem very sure about it," said the thrush.

"It's a cert," said the robin. "The new tenant's an editor!"

II. THE LONG-TAILED TITS

Once upon a time there was a small boy (whom we will think of as Hamish) who, having finished with his little private school, was made ready for a big public one. It was in a distant Northern county and his mother dreaded the time when she would take the child—for he was hardly more than a child—and leave him among all those strangers. She had been to look at it a few weeks before and ever since had shuddered at its vastness and Spartan's simplicity, its bare dining-hall and cold dormitories, so different from Hamish's normal surroundings in London, where everything was cosy. Mothers can suffer agonies for their sons, and this mother was more sensitive and tender-hearted than any.

What Hamish thought about it, when a lull in his exciting life gave him opportunity for thinking, no one knows. If he had misgivings he did not allow them to be seen. But it was

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generally guessed that he could have gone on very happily as a day-bug in Kensington.

And then the fateful morning dawned, and Hamish and his mother, who had been staying in the neighbourhood for the previous night, set out for the school, and Hamish, who had clung to her hand all the way, was swallowed up in the great stone building, and his mother returned alone.

All the way back she thought about his remoteness and friendlessness, picturing him forlorn and miserable; and when she reached home again, Hamish's father had the task of his life to persuade her that all was well—a task that was not made more easy by his total disbelief in what he was saying.

In fact, openly or secretly, both Hamish's parents were in a state of considerable anxiety until the post brought the little boy's first letter, together with one from his house-master's wife. Both contained the same news; but perhaps the adult epistle is the better one to quote. "Hamish," it ran, "has found his feet and is as happy as can be. In fact he is a hero and the envy of the school, for not long after you left he went for a walk and discovered the nest of a long-tailed tit with a number of eggs in it. We are great ornithologists up here, and this gave him a magnificent start."

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We never know when we are performing a fateful act. How little could those long-tailed tits have guessed, as they built their house and prepared to bring up their family, that they were merely paving the way for a small boy to find his new school bearable, and incidentally soothing a mother's fears!

III. AFRICAN ENTERTAINERS

"They're here," said the thrush.

"I know," said the blackbird. "I had a wretched night listening to them. And when I say 'listening' I mean being forced to hear. It takes a little while every year to get used to them."

"Did you notice the people?" the thrush asked.

"Did I not?" said the blackbird. "There they were, all struck silly, as though there was no singing but that in the world. 'Hush!' one of them said. 'Listen!' said another. 'Isn't it marvellous?' a third asked."

"I know," said the thrush. "Every spring it's the same. And now we're in for it for a month or so. Nothing but noisy nights and foolish admiring people. Don't you hate it?" he inquired of the robin and the woodlark who had just flown up and joined them.

"Hate what?" the robin asked.

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"Why this annual fuss about the nightingales," said the thrush. "As though there were no honest English birds with voices."

"I agree," said the robin.

"And it isn't," said the blackbird, "as if one knew what they were singing about. It's all African to me."

"And to me," said the others.

"There's always been a notion that foreigners are better worth listening to than the English," said the woodlark. "I have been praised for sweetness myself, but no one ever comes out on purpose to hear me; and I can sing at night too. No one makes up woodlark parties. They wouldn't be 'romantic,' " he added bitterly. "Home-grown!"

"In my judgment," said the thrush, "you sing better than any nightingale. Your song has some scheme in it; some structure; it goes on. These foreigners are always trying experiments. They give you a little bit of this and a little bit of that and a little bit of the other. All restless and mixed. They break off and begin again. Nothing organic. Now I don't pretend to have a wonderful range myself, but I do sing something definite."

"I think you're a glorious singer," said the woodlark. "And so comforting, so heartening. You're lovely through rain."

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"And," the robin broke in, "there's nothing much the matter with the blackbird, either. He's musical and rich, with perfect enunciation. Who was it said he had a 'box-wood flute'? Not bad. And he's good in rain too. Nightingales are so fussy and capricious. If it's cold they won't sing, if it's wet they won't sing. Fair-weather friends, that's what I call them. But the blackbird, he's always ready with a Cheerio."

"You're very kind," said the blackbird. "I hope you won't accuse me of being mechanically complimentary when I say that in my opinion there are few better English songsters than the robin. He may be a little overdressed. His weakness for fancy vests of a rather violent red can become rather tiresome, but many of the best singers have often been a little loud in their taste. If I incline to something very sober myself, it's because I want to be ready for any function: that's the beauty of black. But to return to what I was saying, the robin's voice is delightful, gay, melodious and well produced. Not like these Africans with their incessant scales and *mélange* of emotion. You never know what they are really feeling—sometimes pretending to be joyful and excited and then affecting melancholy. 'Eternal passion, eternal pain,' some booby called it. To my poor ears

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it's the most superficial exhibition the trees can offer, without anything sincere about it."

"And another thing to be remembered," said the thrush, "is that they only sing for six weeks and then their season's over. Now, we sing all the year round. But it's a mistake; we're very foolish. If we also sang only for a limited time we might have some attention paid us by these people. We're too good to them; we make ourselves cheap. Even in the nippiest weather I've heard our old friend Robin here piping away: but who cares? No one. He has done it too long. They merely say, 'Ah! the robin. I suppose with that waistcoat on he doesn't feel the cold'; or they pay no notice at all. If we were wise, I repeat, we should all stop singing, and then see what the people would do. Before and after the African invasion they would miss us, and then we might come to our own. Then there would be thrush parties and blackbird expeditions and robin adventures; and we too should play our part in assisting lovers. Even the poets might acknowledge our existence, although I don't know that that means much. But people would say, 'Hark!' and 'Listen!' and 'Isn't it marvellous?' and, after all, that must be rather jolly to hear. A little recognition, you know, does tell."

They agreed.

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"Hark!" said the robin suddenly. "What's that?"

"The nightingale," said the blackbird. "They sing by day as well as night now. We've less chance than ever."

"Rather good, don't you think?" said the woodlark, cocking his head on one side and holding up an admonitory claw.

They listened critically.

"A note or two now and then," the blackbird conceded.

"Yes," said the thrush; "but only now and then."

"I don't know," said the woodlark. "Really . . . Don't let's be unfair. Rather good, rather good."

Another voice suddenly filled the air, and the robin turned pale.

"There's that horrible cuckoo," he said. "I must go and protect my nest. That's a really low African, if you like."

IV. THE INTERMEDIARY

Once upon a time came unexpectedly a very cold October day, which upset the plans of a good many people who had made no provision for the winter, and in particular one swallow. This bird, which no doubt had its own reasons for delaying its departure for the South until

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X almost all its companions had gone, found itself more than incommoded by the weather; it was positively hurt. And when the first cold day was followed by a second its plight became pitiful indeed; for not only did it shiver and sigh from the temperature, but it suffered pangs of hunger because none of the insects that it was accustomed to devour were to be found. Either the frost had killed them or they were prudently in hiding. The result was that the poor bird, after flapping miserably over the lawn, fell near the sundial in a ghastly swoon.

Now this lawn belonged to a hospitable noble, who at that time was entertaining a number of guests, among them a young lady of great beauty and the tenderest susceptibilities, and an American gentleman of outrageous wealth and a consuming desire to endow her with as much of it as she wanted, by making her his wife. Hitherto, however, she had treated his very marked attentions with little seriousness: he appeared to be merely one of her many friends; no more.

Such was the position of affairs when, as they left the house on their way to the golf links on the morning of the second cold day, they came suddenly upon the body of the frozen and famished bird.

In a moment Ermyntrode—for such was her
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incredible name—was on her knees beside it, warming it with her pretty hands and murmuring a thousand endearments, one alone of which would have made her other companion happier than the happiest. She then ran with it indoors, called for restoratives, and sat with it before the fire until it opened its eyes and then its beak and gradually began to live again, while the millionaire stood or crouched beside her, divided in feeling between an ecstasy of admiration for such solicitude and the regretful knowledge that no injury that might befall himself could, at any rate at the moment, lead to such devotion and service. Had he thought that it could he would cheerfully have undergone any pain.

Meanwhile the patient was being offered every kind of food that (as a grim man of science, who was also in the house-party, remarked) swallows don't eat—even to hemp and rape borrowed from the canary. But all in vain. And then suddenly, to the astonishment of every one—not least the man of science—it fluttered from the hearth and flew softly towards one of the windows, where it settled on a ledge and began furiously to catch and consume the flies gathered there. It seemed little less than a miracle!

But unfortunately there was no miraculous multiplication of flies, which soon gave out, and

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so for the next hour or so every one in the house, with the exception of the man of science, who maintained stoutly that the only really kind act possible was to put the poor creature out of its inevitable misery, was engaged in the unfamiliar task of seeking for more of the desired refreshment. Old and young alike were to be found perched precariously on chairs and ladders, endeavouring to snatch flies from pane or ceiling: to be conveyed, alive if possible, to the invalid; such was the strength of a suddenly awakened humanitarianism or else the potency of Ermyntrude's charms.

And the swallow meanwhile was also working to ingratiate itself, for it would settle like thistledown on the arm of a chair in which one of its entertainers was sitting, or on the table beside another, and now and then even on their heads. And nothing is so flattering as to receive such attentions as these from a little bird.

"If only," Ermyntrude exclaimed towards the end of lunch, "it could be got to sunny climes! But how?" And her beautiful features were clouded with grief.

"Hm!" said the American thoughtfully, and left the room. . . .

The swallow slept in Ermyntrude's bed-chamber, under an inverted wastepaper-basket near the fire, and next morning it was still alive

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and apparently hungrier than ever. How it would have got through this day, with the supply of flies so low—for yesterday's *battue* had practically cleared the house—I cannot say; but the problem did not rise, for there suddenly appeared from London a quiet man with a specially warmed case and a box of living gnats, who packed the bird up and hastened off with it to catch the noon aeroplane to Paris, and so on to the South of France, at the command of his employer, the American millionaire.

"How wonderful of you to think of it!" said Ermytrude as they watched the car vanishing towards the station.

"I'd have taken it myself," he replied, "but that I should have been away from—from here."

When, later, the man of science was told of the expedition extraordinary, he uttered a characteristically sardonic sound.

"Monte Carlo!" he exclaimed. "Why Monte Carlo?"

"Don't swallows go there for the winter?" the millionaire asked. "I always thought that was the place."

"They might as well stay here," said the F.R.S.; "Monte Carlo is thousands of miles too far north. They go to the Congo."

"Very well," said the American; "then I'll

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cable my man to go on to the Congo." And there is no doubt that he would have done so if a telegram had not at that moment been brought to him. "Regret," it ran, "to have to inform you that on arrival at Paris aerodrome the bird was found to be dead."

"Poor little thing!" exclaimed Ermyntrode, her lovely eyes brimming over as she laid her hand gently on the American's. "But how can I thank you for all your kindness?" she asked.

"There is a way," he whispered.

And some time after dinner she took it, and we all offered our congratulations.

Who says that sick swallows are no use?

THE PARAGONS

SOME artists are so unpractical, live so far removed from ordinary life and its needs, that they are not the best of hosts. Needing little themselves and keeping no fixed hours, they get into the way of forgetting that less gifted men require comfort and rhythmical nourishment.

But Parkes is not like that. Parkes, who is not dependent upon his brush, respects the timetable and abhors a vacuum equally in himself and his guests. This perhaps is because, as certain less fortunate craftsmen say, he is more of a painter than an artist. I am not, however, concerned with causes, only with the effect, and the effect is a general feeling of well-being when one is under Parkes's roof.

I was there the other day.

One of the pleasures of visiting a friend who is also a collector is sending one's eyes on voyages of discovery to learn what is new.

"Hallo!" you say, "that little water-colour wasn't there when I was here last."

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"So it was *you*," you say, "who bought that Daumier at Christie's."

"What a lovely piece of red lacquer," you say, turning to another recent *trouvaille*. "What luck you have!"

Things like that.

On this occasion there was not so much that was fresh until I came to Parkes's own little study, where my roving gaze alighted upon a set of portraits grouped together on one of the walls. They were what are called kit-cats, or less than half-length, and four were men and four were of the sex that is alleged to be gentler. They were all pleasant looking but not exactly distinguished, and I couldn't place them. They were too modern to be ancestors; they suggested no relationship either to each other or to Parkes. They were, I felt sure, not public characters.

Parkes was evidently amused by my interest.

"Those portraits," he said. "They puzzle you?"

"A little," I replied. "I don't know who they are, and yet I feel as if I ought to know. Something faintly familiar. No, not exactly familiar; they look as if one would like them. But do tell me."

"It's a group of servants," he said. "Servants of mine. I painted them."

"They're not with you now?" I asked.

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"No," he said, "not now. The man at the end was a chauffeur. A capital chap. I miss him every day. He drove steadily and surely. He never jerked the car and he changed his gears without fuss; he saw that the windows would open and close easily; he knew the way. Perhaps his most noticeable quality was his willingness to go slowly. He was never cross, not even when I told him to go back. His bill for repairs was almost nothing a month.

"The man next to him," Parkes continued, "was the gardener. He too was a treasure. He allowed me to pick my own fruit and flowers. He mowed the lawn cheerfully every other day. His children didn't scream. His wife was never ill. He didn't say that he must have a boy to help him.

"The third man was the butler," said Parkes. "A priceless fellow. You could trust him not to shake the claret, not to decant too much. More, you could trust him to take the chill off without mulling it. He may have helped himself a little freely, but that doesn't matter. A butler ought to know what his wines taste like. You know how a man sometimes will pour out the last glass of hock all muddy. Well, he never did that. He always saw that the soda-water was on the ice too."

"You were lucky," I said.

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He smiled an odd smile.

"The other man," he went on, "was my valet. No one could have had a better. He saw that I never ran out of cigarettes or cigars; he watched my socks; he found holes in gloves and had them mended. If I dropped a collar stud it didn't matter because he always had another. He never spoke first. He was a misogynist. I once overheard him saying something about me which led me to suppose that I might have been a hero to him."

"And the maids," I remarked, "they look as if they were exceptional too."

"They were," he said. "The cook there, on the left, she was splendid. She used to send up the most delicious things. Her omelettes were a dream. Her salads were like a French-woman's. Nothing was ever sodden. Nothing was late. Everything was hot. She gave me something attractive for breakfast every day. She knew how to bake bacon in the oven. She had no male cousins in the kitchen.

"And those other girls were so good too. Particularly the last, the parlour-maid. Her discretion was wonderful. And she was so clever with the telephone; almost a secretary. Pretty too, wasn't she?"

I said that she was. Almost perilously so.

He sighed.

The Paragons

"But what I can't understand," I said, "is how they came to leave you. Because you're so jolly with all your people. They must have realised they were well placed. Why did they leave? Not merely one, but all?"

"They didn't," he said.

"But I haven't seen any of them," I exclaimed. "Quite the reverse," I might have added.

"No," he said.

I gave it up.

"It's like this," he said: "they didn't leave because they were never here. They were never here because they never existed. They're the servants we all want and can't find. The ideal. I painted them to remind me of perfection. The
x Greeks surrounded themselves with statues of the loveliest women and the comeliest men; so why shouldn't I try to get a humane influence from these perfect ministrants and live, so to speak, in the benediction of their aura?"

"'Myes," I replied. "But I should have thought that the difference between these and the servants we have to put up with would have been so unsatisfactory as to cause too much melancholy."

He groaned. "Then you noticed at lunch how cold the claret was?" he asked.

FATE MALEVOLENT

IT is idle to tell me," said the stern man, "that Fate is merely a tissue of undirected caprice. I am as persuaded that we can be the conscious sport of Chance as you are that Chance is blind. I had another proof of it only last week.

"Last week," he continued, "it was my bad fortune—or it may be good fortune—to lose the last tooth in my lower jaw. I express myself as in doubt as to the effect, beneficial or otherwise, because the people that I have since met have been divided into two camps: a very small one, which applauds the good sense of myself and the wisdom of my dentist, and a very large one, which says that all this extraction is rubbish, a passing craze, and that I shall never cease to regret it.

"I have had a suspicion all my life that every one's own dentist is the best and all other dentists are mischievous impostors; but never has that theory received so much support. 'What a pity you didn't consult my man!' is a phrase that I have heard twenty times a day. If I

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had any ivory left you would find it engraved there.

"All I can say at the moment is that whatever benefit may proceed from this dental operation, nothing but discomfort was the immediate result, for with the last tooth went the plate also; and for a few days I was a pitiable object.

"Now, I don't want to probe into dark secrets, but I dare say that some of you know what a plate is, and are aware that, in order to pronounce certain words, especially those beginning with sibilants, two rows of teeth are important.

"Very well, then. I come to my point.

"You say that Chance is blind, that the Fates are without deliberate mischief and malice. In that case will you explain why it is that it was not until I was without my full speaking apparatus that I found myself in a company that was discussing poetry and looked to me as an authority? And it isn't as if they were discussing such poets as have honest patronymics, such as Browning and Blake and Brontë and Byron and Marlowe and Marvell and Moore and Drummond and Patmore and Pope. I did all I could to keep the conversations to such as these; but in vain. It was those impossible others that were at the forefront.

"I ask you if it was not through some malig-

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nant and diabolical supernatural pre-arrangement, rather than accident, that, within a few moments of sitting down, the lady next to me asked me to tell her the name of Mr. A. E. Housman's most famous book? This work has been published for years and no one ever required me to mention its title before. They have always known it. Why should it happen on one of the first days of my life on which to say 'Shropshire' was an impossibility? Tell me that.

"I made some sort of an effort, but only to be further humiliated, for she then asked me what was my favourite place in Mr. Housman's county. Now, my favourite places are Shrewsbury and Church Stretton; but do you think I tried to say so? Not I. I said Ludlow, and in saying so told a lie and betrayed Salop.

"I again pass over some fairly thin ice, of which Shakespeare and Shelley were constituents, and come to a final treachery on my part, forced upon me by the same inquisitive female. 'That beautiful poem called *The Song of Honour*,' she said; 'do tell me the name of its author.'

"Now nobody has much better reason than I to know that it is by Mr. Ralph Hodgson. But put yourself in my place—you who also have suffered from the new wholesale dentistry. To

Fate Malevolent

us, of all names, 'Hodgson' is the worst, as in a second's time, mentally rehearsing it, I discovered. And here we have maleficent Fate again. The *Shropshire Lad* question might just possibly have been chance; but the *Song of Honour* question coming so soon after settled everything. Clearly I was being pursued; I was a victim; the naughty gods were in want of something to make them laugh.

"You who have been plateless too, what would you have done? There were two courses. One was to feign ignorance and say, 'I've forgotten'; the other was to take refuge among the friendly labials and pull the lady's leg. I took the second course. 'Wasn't it Binyon?' I replied."

That was the end of that ordeal. But I was not through yet: the gods had not enjoyed sufficient mirth and worse was to come. Later in the evening my hostess, who is fond of abstruse matters, was speaking of a remarkable case of clairvoyance which she had read in the paper. She produced the cutting, but, finding that she had left her glasses somewhere, she asked me to be so good as to read it. You who know what it is to be without the lower row will give me all your sympathy when I say that the first sentence began, "A very curious instance of the working of what may be called the sixth

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sense"—and so on. But I did not get as far even as that. No sooner did my eye, foraging ahead, alight upon "sixth sense" than I extemporised the finest coughing fit of my life and passed the cutting to a neighbour.

"Blind chance indeed! Intentional mischief every time!"

THE BEST POLICY

I. THE THEATRE PARTY

I FOUND the rising barrister sitting dejectedly over his coffee. Rising barristers and dejection are, as a rule, on such bad terms that I was forced to comment on his appearance.

"What do you think," he asked, "about honesty? Is it really the best policy?"

I said I was in no position to have formed an opinion.

"Well," he replied, "I am. I hereby state that it is more than the best, it is the only policy for anyone who wishes to live comfortably. I had an experience last evening so obnoxious that I'll never run a similar risk again. In other words, from this moment onwards, no matter what the cost—either to other people or myself—I'll tell the truth."

"Tell me some of it now," I said.

He was delighted to.

"Last night," he said, "Doris and I dined with the Fullers, to go to the theatre. We weren't told what theatre; we were asked merely

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to dine and go on somewhere. Early. Personally I hate dining early. No one can enjoy on the same evening both dinner and theatre; one or other has to suffer, and possibly both; and I am reaching a time of life when I prefer cooks to dramatists. But now and then you have to do these things, and so we went.

"‘I wonder where they will take us,’ Doris said in the cab.

"‘So long as it isn’t to *Sweethearts and Cream* I don’t much mind,’ I replied. ‘But I’d rather be eating slowly and have a cigar after; and I’d rather die than sit through that play again, or even an act of it.’

"‘And Doris agreed. We had never been so bored in our lives as when we were there.

"‘Directly we got into the Fullers’ drawing-room Mrs. Fuller, who is the sweetest thing on earth, said to me in her sweetest way, ‘Don’t break my heart by telling me that you have seen *Sweethearts and Cream*, because that’s where we are taking you to-night. It’s delicious.’

"‘No,’ I said, ‘we haven’t. I’ve heard so much about it. How jolly!’

"‘And then I looked round for Doris to be able to warn her to back me up. But she was talking to Fuller, and, before anything could be done, Mrs. Fuller was calling out to him, ‘It’s all

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right, Jack. They haven't seen it. Isn't that splendid luck?'

"'What is that?' Doris asked.

"'*Sweethearts and Cream*,' said Fuller. 'You're in for a great time. We adored it.'

"Doris caught my eye for an instant and I breathed again, for I saw support there. But there was no need for so much of it. 'Oh,' she said with the most alarming assurance—really I had no notion she was such a masterpiece of deception—'how delightful! We were wondering in the cab where you would take us. In fact,' she went on, without the least necessity to elaborate any more, or a trace of guilt (it was monstrous, monstrous!), 'we even mentioned *Sweethearts and Cream*.'

"That was true, of course, but—well, my blood ran cold."

Women can be terrible.

He stopped and gloomily lit another cigar. "How I hate lying," he said.

"Well, so far as I can see," I replied, "you got out of it very well. They were white lies merely; I never heard of whiter, and if Doris a little bit overdid it that was only her kind heart. Why are you so wretched about it?"

"I'd tell you," he said, "if you didn't interrupt so much. We had dinner—one of those scrambled affairs—so as to be in time to see the

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accursed curtain go up, and off we bustled. If it hadn't been for that bustling all would have been well. If we had been five minutes late—just five blessed little minutes—all would have been well. But we weren't. We got into the lobby with every one else, and the first man I saw was Bundy. You know Bundy—noisy and tactless. 'Hello!' he said at the top of his voice, greeting all of us; and then to Doris and me: 'Fancy seeing you here again! Why, when we were here the other evening you said it was the worst play you had ever suffered!' "

II. THE CHINESE VASES

Honesty as the best policy was again being discussed.

"At any rate," said my host, "so far as comfort is concerned it has no equal. If you have a conscience, as I happen to have, you tell the truth in order to keep on terms with it. What it is like to have no conscience I am unable to say; I wish I knew. But with a conscience one is forced into rectitude on the principle of anything for a quiet life. I'll give you an example.

"Some years ago I went down to the country to stay with friends, and while I was there I was dragged to a bazaar. Bazaars are not in the least in my line, but I couldn't very well refuse to accompany my hostess. There was a

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distinct promise that it was only for a short time.

"It was the usual thing. Hot women in large hats presiding at stalls; the vicar and his curates purring and superintending and interfering; the prettier girls offering button-holes at starvation prices and pinning them archly on you, or appealing to you to buy tickets in a raffle; a palmist here, a chirographist there, and occasionally an auction by a comic parishioner, retired Army men scowlingly searching the jumble counter for their favourite old clothes. If there are to be new roofs for vestries, such things must, I suppose, be; but they are a terrible form of necessity.

"I had done my best to find something to buy, but in vain. With the most generous of intentions it is sometimes impossible to bring oneself to part with money for articles that you dislike too much, or are too much of a snob, too proud of your own reputation for taste, to give away. And then suddenly I came to a stall of miscellaneous things, where there was a pair of Chinese vases. I was a collector of porcelain in a small way, and I guessed these to be good, although I had not knowledge enough to be certain, and I asked the price.

"The owner of the stall—Lady Something-or-other—an elderly woman, told me she had

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had them for years and didn't like them. She had taken this opportunity of getting rid of them in a good cause. Would I give three pounds for the two?

"I said I would, and paid the money and bore them myself to the car. That they were worth more I was convinced, but I didn't know how much. I knew enough, however, to reopen the old debate that a scrupulously honest man carries on in his mind when he has taken advantage of a dealer's ignorance. Sophistry says that a dealer should know; it is his business to know; one cannot sell as well as buy: and think of the people he has probably swindled! Moreover in this case Lady So-and-so had named the price and I had paid it; there had been no haggling. None the less, I knew in my heart of hearts that I had done the vestry roof out of a lot of tiles.

"Well, I brought the vases back to London and had them valued, and, as I was offered two hundred pounds for them by the expert, I knew they must be worth double that sum. But still I did nothing. I set them up in my rooms and received many congratulations on having acquired such beautiful specimens; but I got no pleasure out of it. I was not on the right terms with myself.

"Gradually I began to lose sleep. I would

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wake in the night and hear the vases conversing, lamenting with each other that two such distinguished vessels should have fetched so little. It touched their Oriental pride. But my own pride was touched still more acutely, and loss of sleep being a misfortune that no one can bear with equanimity, I took action.

"I wrote to Lady So-and-so, reminding her of the bazaar and my purchase and telling her that it had come to my knowledge (as though it were yesterday—for no one is honest in every particular) that the vases were of greater value than either she or I had any idea of, and that I thought it only fair that they should be returned to her as she had parted with them under a misapprehension. I then had the vases packed with the utmost care and dispatched them to her with this magnanimous epistle.

"In due course I had a letter thanking me for my chivalrous conduct and saying that she had sold the vases to a London dealer for two hundred and eighty guineas.

"There," he concluded, "that's my story. Was honesty the best policy? As a luller of conscience, yes. Otherwise I don't see why I shouldn't have had that money to play with as well as she."

"But of course she gave you a share of it?" I asked.

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"Not a penny."

"She didn't give you any souvenir of the affair? A box of cigars? A cigarette-case?"

"No," he said. "But I didn't mind that. What I did mind—and what still rankles—is that she never even returned my original three pounds."

A FORMIDABLE WOMAN

THE other evening I went to see a *revue* at what is called an "intimate" theatre. There were amusing moments in the entertainment, but what interested more than anything on the stage was a young girl in one of the boxes, accompanied by four or five men. She was dressed almost as sparingly as the ladies of the chorus and she made hardly less noise, talking or laughing all the while and occasionally dropping cigarette ash on the stalls beneath. Whatever intimacy the house enjoyed without her was enormously increased by her presence.

She held my attention both as an individual and as a sign of the times; and "What would Mentoria say?" I kept asking myself. The more I recalled Mentoria and all that has happened to girls since her day, the more unhappy I became, until the thought of her anguished stately countenance, so distinguished and so refined, with culture and fastidiousness impressed on every feature, was too much and I came away. I left as the girl was having a match

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held by one of the friends to her fourteenth cigarette.

That night, by way of contrast, I turned again to the volume in which *Mentoria* is enshrined and again spent an hour in her fascinating society. And who was *Mentoria*? She was the creation of Ann Murry (of whom the *Dictionary of National Biography* says nothing) and she is to be found in a book entitled *Mentoria: or the Young Ladies' Instructor, in Familiar Conversations on Moral and Entertaining Subjects: Calculated to improve Young Minds in the Essential, as well as Ornamental, Parts of Female Education*. The first edition was published in 1778 and the work seemed to have some vogue, for a sixth, with new prefatory matter, was called for in 1791. With the idea of displaying not only the range of *Mentoria's* interests and her calm readiness for any question, but also the standard of refined education in those distant days, I have transcribed the few passages that follow. I should premise that Lady Mary and Lady Louisa are *Mentoria's* two pupils. It would be impossible to imagine her imparting information to the untitled.

Let us begin with Grammar—

Mentoria:

I shall conclude this dissertation by inquiring whether you remember the Epicene Nouns.

A Formidable Woman

Lady Mary:

Are they not those which may with equal propriety be applied to the Masculine and Feminine Gender?

Mentoria:

You are perfectly right, as to the general idea. I shall enumerate a few particular instances; which, I hope, will enable you to form a competent knowledge of this branch of Grammar. Example:—The terms, Parent, Children, Friend, Neighbour, Cousin, Servant are all Epicenes.

Lady Louisa:

My dear Mentoria, nothing can be more clear. Lord and Lady H. are my parents; Lord George and myself are their children. The Duke and Duchess of D. are my friends; Sir Charles and Lady F. my neighbours; Lord William and Lady Francis S. my cousins; and Thomas and Kitty, servants.

Mentoria:

It gives me great pleasure to find your Ladyship so attentive to my instructions; you could not possibly have given me a stronger proof of your profiting by them, than the just comparison you have drawn.

We pass now to demeanour with guests. After some coy delays Lady Mary collects enough courage to ask Mentoria if Lady Jane Placid and Lady Ann Sprightly may spend a

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day with herself and her sister. Mentoria graciously acquiesces. Then:—

Lady Louisa:

Which do you like best, my dear Mentoria, Lady Jane Placid or Lady Ann Sprightly?

Mentoria:

Their qualities are so very different, it is difficult to determine which is the most worthy of admiration, they both possess great merit, though in such different line, they will not admit of a comparison, as Lady Ann's vivacity enlivens Lady Jane's composure and serenity, and Lady Jane's complacency keeps Lady Ann's cheerfulness within proper bounds. That you see they both derive advantage from the contrast which is found in their characters.

Lady Mary:

May we invite Miss Simple the same day?

Mentoria:

By no means: you should always endeavour to form your party of such persons, whose sentiments and pursuits are supposed to agree. Lady Francis Trifle, and Lady Betty Hoyden, will be more suitable to Miss Simple.

Lady Mary:

Pray, my dear Mentoria, instruct us how to behave the whole day. I should be very sorry if we spoke or acted improperly to Lady Jane,

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or Lady Ann, when they favour us with their company.

Mentoria:

It is scarcely possible to form a settled plan for behaviour, as there are so many circumstances, on which the propriety of it depends; so that it can only be regulated by good sense and discretion, which will ever dictate what is proper to be performed on every occasion. But notwithstanding I cannot reduce politeness to a regular system, I will endeavour to point out a few of its essential qualities.

Lady Louisa:

How should we receive our visitors, my good Mentoria?

Mentoria:

You should endeavour to express how happy you are to see them; that you have thought it long, since you had last that pleasure. You should then inquire after their own health, and that of every branch of their family: and if they have been ill, congratulate them on their recovery. Respecting Amusements, you should never consult your own inclinations, but always let those of your guests take the lead; and never raise trifling objections to any they propose. As their entertainment is the chief object, you should readily comply with whatever seems conducive to it. It would make you appear petulant, as well as impolite, if, when they expressed a desire to play at Questions and Commands, you seemed discontented and declared a prefer-

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ence to play at Blind Man's Buff. It is also incumbent on you to check any little disputes between your younger sisters and brothers; and, so far from taking the least part with them, you should wholly suppress them. This conduct will make you appear in an amiable light, and give Lady Jane and Lady Ann a favourable impression of you.

Lady Mary:

I hope, by the help of your kind instructions, we shall behave with propriety, particularly at dinner-time.

Mentoria:

Do not suffer your attention to your guests so wholly to take up your thoughts as to make you forgetful of the superior obligations you owe to your Creator: return Him thanks for the blessings He has already granted, and implore His future mercies, before you partake of the repast His Providence has afforded you. When this duty is performed, help your friends to those parts you think best, and which, in general, seem in the highest estimation. Let the attention you pay them prevent their requesting to be helped to any particular dish. If they express their approbation, and seem to give a preference to any part of the entertainment, you should request them to testify how much they like it, by eating some more of it. . . . There is another circumstance, I shall mention, which is never to be warm in the praise of your own victuals, or even mention what they cost. . . . Let me entreat you to close your meal with thanksgiving

A Formidable Woman

and praise to the great Cause, from whence it proceeded; which will inspire your mind with ease and cheerfulness.

Lady Mary:

Ought I, my dear Mentoria, to inquire what work they are about, what books they have read, or where they have been?

Mentoria:

Yes, my dear, though the bare reply to these questions ought not to satisfy your Ladyship. When you are informed of their different pursuits, inquire how far they are advanced in their embroidery; and whether they think it possible you could execute a piece of the same nature. Respecting books, you should express a desire to know their opinion of those they have read, as well as yourself, to find if their sentiments correspond with your own; and also of new publications, and authors to which you are a stranger; that by their account you may form an idea whether they would improve or entertain you.

Lady Louisa:

How, my dear Madam, are we to be employed after we have drank tea?

Mentoria:

You should propose several kinds of amusements, and when the ladies have determined the choice, pursue it without deliberation, for fear their carriage should fetch them when you are

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in the height of your diversion; which might perhaps oblige you to leave it.

Lady Mary:

How must I take leave of them: I am sure I shall be sorry to part with friends I so much esteem.

Mentoria:

Your feelings will suggest to your Ladyship the best mode of expressing them, which I should suppose will be to this effect: that you regretted being deprived of their company so early, and that you had no idea it was so late, you had been so happy in their conversation. You should also desire them to present your love, or compliments, to every part of the family.

In the dialogue on Geography, which was Mentoria's favourite subject, we meet Lord George, the brother of Lady Mary and Lady Louisa and also catch a glimpse of another member of the unfortunate Simple family. I quote from it partly in the hope that a Harrovian eye may alight upon it.

Mentoria:

Before I begin the business allotted for this morning, I shall congratulate you on your brother's arrival from Harrow, and beg the favour of Lady Louisa to inform him, I shall be extremely glad of his Company, which, undoubtedly, will be an addition to your happiness.

A Formidable Woman

Lady Louisa:

My dear Mentoria, I will fetch him this moment, as I know he will rejoice to join our party. (Lady L. returns, introducing her brother Lord George.) You cannot imagine, my dear Mentoria, how rejoiced Lord George was to come; and he would bring his books to read to you.

Mentoria:

I thought it might be agreeable to your Lordship to spend some of your leisure hours with your sisters, which induced me to request the favour of your company. I will join with them in endeavouring to make the holidays as cheerful to you as possible. I hope you will not think it lessens your consequence as a man, to be taught by a Governess, and have young Ladies for your school-fellows and companions.

Lord George:

Not in the least, Madam. I shall esteem myself much obliged to you, for permitting me to partake of your instructions.

Mentoria:

Pray, my Lord, who is your particular friend at school? Do any of Miss Simple's brothers or cousins go to Harrow? The family of the Simples are so numerous, I think, wherever one goes there is some branch of it.

Lord George:

I recollect several of that name; but he who is the most remarkable, is Sir Simon Simple, cousin to Miss Simple you know.

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Mentoria:

By what quality is he so particularly distinguished? I fear by none that does him credit.

Lord George:

When we are conning our lessons, he is playing at marbles; so that when his master is to hear his task, he cannot say it; for which he gets flogged: and when we are at play, he is blubbering and crying, with a fool's cap on his head.

Lady Louisa:

How I should laugh at him, and compare him to Midas, with his ass's ears.

Lord George turns out to be a youth of a very inquiring mind and in the rest of the book puts most of the posers. Thus:—

Lord George:

Should we do everything our parents command? If they require us to perform what was unreasonable, or blameable, ought we to comply with their request?

Mentoria:

There is little danger of parents leading a child into error by design; whenever they mistake the means of their advantage or happiness, the defect is in their judgment. As, in general, parents are too apt to err on the side of tenderness, children should in every instance conform,

A Formidable Woman

and be subservient to their will. Our blessed Saviour, notwithstanding the divinity of His nature (which, in some degree, made Him independent of His parents) in various instances manifested His filial affection: and we are expressly told, He was subject to them. Let me entreat you to make His obedience, as well as every other virtue He possessed, the model for your conduct. Imitate His example, and be guided by His precepts; write His instructions on the tablets of your heart, which will be legible in all your actions, and make you a useful member of Society. . . .

What a long time ago it all seems!

Lady Louisa:

I wish to know, how you would have us behave to our *servants*, my dear Mentoria?

Mentoria:

With humanity and condescension: you should always remember, notwithstanding they are your inferiors, that they are your fellow creatures, and in your conduct towards them equally avoid haughtiness and familiarity. Maintain your own dignity, nor ever lose it, by permitting a servant to joke with you, or partake of your recreations: such proceedings are not the effect of humility, but of a depraved taste, and meanness of spirit. There are some persons so fond of superiority, they choose to associate with those who are beneath, or dependent on them, for no other reason, than the opportunity it

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affords them of gratifying their inclinations without control or reproach. . . .

Finally, let me quote this. It will please, or displease, Mr. Belloc.

Lady Mary:

I imagine, my dear Mentoria, we are not required to be kind to the Jews.

Mentoria:

Their religious sentiments would not excuse your failing to perform any duty you owed them, as fellow creatures. Their errors, though fatal in their tendency, demand our pity, as they are a defect of judgment.

THE PORK PIE

SHYNESS, bashfulness, morbid self-consciousness, nervousness, call it what you will," said the eminent K.C., "is a very real malady to those that suffer from it, although the world has agreed to make it a subject for ridicule and laughter. And that, when you come to think of how many people undergo tortures from it when they are young, if not for ever, is an odd thing. They ought to be kinder. Nor can ridicule help; the only remedy is time. As we grow older our hide thickens; the sense of shame is less acute; we gradually learn that every one else's eyes and thoughts are not concentrated on ourselves, as we used to believe and fear; the sense of shame is less acute. Isn't that so?" he asked, looking round.

We were perhaps almost too quick and unanimous in our agreement. He did not, however, flinch. Eminent K.C.'s don't.

"Disregard of the opinion of others," he went smoothly on, "is a very slow growth, and sometimes it never comes at all. Why, I assure you that there was a time in my life when I too crept

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about among strangers as fearfully and blushing as anybody ever afflicted in this way. I can remember, and minutely remember, to this moment, although I was then in the early twenties, an occasion when because of it I nearly starved in the midst of plenty. Incredible it seems to-day, but it is true. Would you like to hear it?"

Before anyone could say "No" he was in full swing.

"I had been staying," he said, "in the country, in the North, and had come away too early to get any breakfast. After an hour or so—it is before the days when a blessed little letter 'r' began to be put against the times of the trains in *Bradshaw*—after an hour or so of gnawing hunger and faintness we stopped at Melton Mowbray, and I rushed from the carriage to the refreshment-room and bought a pork pie.

"The girl put it into a paper bag and I rushed back with it, far more precipitately, as it happened, than there was any need for, as we were there for five minutes, long enough for boys bearing trays of these commodities to make the tour of the whole train. One of these had just arrived at my carriage, in which were seated besides myself two men—big, prosperous, commanding men, such as I knew in my heart I could never, never be.

The Pork Pie

“ ‘Pork pie, sir?’ said the boy to one of them.

“ ‘Pork pie!’ exclaimed the man shudderingly and scornfully. ‘Good heavens, no! I’d rather die than touch the things’; and the boy disappeared in terror, while I hastily intruded my body between the guilty package and the speaker’s line of vision.

“ ‘Do people still eat pork pies?’ he asked his friend.

“ ‘Apparently,’ the other replied. ‘Amazing, isn’t it?’

“And they settled back in their seats reflecting comfortably on their own cautious taste and the folly of others.

“Now here was a terrible situation for me. An ordinary sensible youth in my position, hearing such sentiments, would have paid no attention, but doggedly have eaten his fill. An impudent youth would have devoured his food in their faces. A youth of ordinary shyness would either have got into another compartment, which I had not the pluck to attempt, so conspicuous would it make me (and the dread of being conspicuous is, of course, the dominating factor in the lives of the self-conscious); or he would have said, ‘I’m sorry, gentlemen, if I offend you, but I’ve had no breakfast and must either tackle this disgusting food or expire.’ But none of

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these courses was possible to me: I was doomed. Their fastidiousness had rung my knell.

"Meanwhile the train resumed its deliberate journey towards London: nearly three hours more at least; and I sat there ravaged by pangs of emptiness, but totally incapable of undoing the paper bag and revealing not only its horrid secret but my own barbarous and revolting tendencies. I wonder if this pitiful experience touches a chord in any of you; I wonder if anyone could be such a worm as I was then."

He paused and sighed; but surely not with regret? And yet. . . .

"To eat," he went on, "anything beneath the gaze of those two assured and well-nourished fellow-passengers, full of bacon and eggs and coffee, consumed at a proper hour before starting, would be, I had only too feelingly known before we reached Melton Mowbray, a trial of courage needing every reserve of determination and fortitude that I could muster. I had known all that when I rushed from the carriage to buy the infernal thing; but such was the call of the vacuum that I was prepared to make the effort. But now I could not. In the knowledge of the disapproval of pork pies held by two such masterful and orderly creatures, and conveyed in such uncompromising terms, no craving could be

The Pork Pie

powerful enough to nerve my hand to lift even a crumb of that solace to my mouth.

"In public, at any rate.

"My only hope lay in the possibility of their going to sleep; and never can human eyelids have been watched with more persistence, though of course furtively, than were theirs. Now and then it seemed as if fortune were at last to be on my side, for one nodded and then the other, but never both together. Again and again I fumbled to break off a scrap of the corrugated battlement of the pie, but only to desist in a panic as wakefulness reasserted itself.

"To my eternal disgrace be it said that I reached London without one atom of it entering my famished system. I doubt if shyness, with all its victories, ever had such a triumph as that. It was not even as if the woman had entered into the case.

"That must be more than thirty years ago," he concluded with another sigh. "Time the healer, again."

"Yes," some one said. "You've got over it now all right?"

SYMMETRY

ONE evening, seven years ago, Miss Elizabeth Saunders, who filled the post of parlour-maid at No. 35, Kensington Crescent, the home of Sir Philip and Lady Melvin, omitted, for the first time in her long period of vigilant service, to fasten the dining-room windows, the central one of which was left open several inches. All oblivious of this fact the household, at ten-thirty, retired to sleep.

Two hours later Mr. Henry Johnson, who had carefully watched the policeman pass to another section of his beat, was walking quietly down the Crescent, looking from right to left for indications of precisely such an oversight as Elizabeth had been guilty of, and at No. 35 he found them. From that moment all was fairly easy. Working with silence and dispatch, he entered Sir Philip's dining-room, selected what was most valuable among the silver in the sideboard, and regained the street.

How such burglars make their escape so successfully in a city full of suspicious constabulary is a problem. Ordinary persons hom-

Symmetry

ing in the small hours are scrutinised closely. I myself free from criminal tendencies as it is my tedious habit to be, often, after a late night, knowing that a policeman's eye was on me, have taken on a self-consciousness which must look very like guilt; and one would imagine that soft-footed men carrying heavy bags at dawn would be challenged as a matter of course. But no. That they are ultimately caught is very often the case, but only through processes of deduction and pursuit some time afterwards. Interception on the night itself is exceedingly rare. Thus it was that Henry Johnson was able to return home in safety with the Melvin plate over his shoulder.

The next morning the hue and cry began. Sir Philip, directly he learned of the loss, communicated with the police. Detectives arrived and examined the premises. Finger-marks were found, for Henry Johnson had disdained to work in gloves. Pawnbrokers were notified. (And here let me say what a pleasure—what a relief—it is to the conscientious literary artist when, all too seldom, the right word is found for him. We toil and toil after exact equivalents; too often failing. And then, by way perhaps of reward, an occasion arises when there is no alternative at all, when selection is automatic. It is so in this matter of pawnbrokers

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and thieves. After a robbery, pawnbrokers are always "notified." They might be "told," they might be "informed," they might be "warned"; but no. They are "notified.")

Sir Philip also communicated with the Insurance Company, fixing the amount of the loss at ninety pounds, and I am not sure that he was altogether pleased when the news arrived a day or so later that not only had the burglar been caught, but the stolen goods had been traced and recovered; for enough plate still remained for all the ordinary needs of two very quietly living elderly people, and ninety pounds was a sum that he, an inveterate collector of rare editions, would have found very useful. Indeed, he had already laid it out with minute solicitude, possibly more than once.

Still, Henry Johnson was now caught (not without a curiously sanguinary struggle in which a policeman was nearly killed) and the silver was safe; and in due time came the hearing of the case and Henry's disappearance to Dartmoor for seven years.

And so ends the first part of this veracious history.

Part II. opened the other day, when Elizabeth Saunders, now seven years older, informed Sir Philip, also seven years older, who was

Symmetry

reading upstairs, that a man was at the front door asking to see him.

What was his name?

He would give none.

Did he know Sir Philip?

He said that Sir Philip would know him when he saw him.

What did he want?

He would say only to Sir Philip.

"Tell him," said Sir Philip, who has to husband his strength nowadays, "that I cannot see him unless he brings a letter from some one guaranteeing his genuineness."

And the man went away.

Two hours later he returned with an envelope which Elizabeth carried up to her master. It contained a letter beginning "Dear Sir Philip Melvin" (I have seen the document), and going on to explain that the writer was Henry Johnson, the burglar, who desired above all things the privilege of a short interview. His prison papers, his discharge dated only yesterday, and so forth, were enclosed as evidence of good faith.

What was Sir Philip to do? He is a humane man and a forgiving man. It is true that Henry Johnson had stolen his plate, but that was seven years ago and he had been punished for it. Moreover, who knows what Henry Johnson's

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temptations might have been; although it is also true that nothing to his credit had come out at the trial, and the way he had set about the policemen who arrested him was, according to the evidence, somethink crool. Still, here was the man, the very day after leaving Dartmoor, on the doorstep of the stranger he had robbed; and no doubt he was full of penitence. He had hastened to his victims first, to make some kind of atonement. Purged of offence, he wished to ask their pardon and begin afresh, an honest man.

"I will see him," said Sir Philip, and he descended the stairs, not altogether unconscious of magnanimity.

At the door stood Henry Johnson, the same man whom he had last seen seven years ago in the dock. He was older but far from abject in mien. Still, under that anti-social exterior might be repentance and shame.

"Good afternocn, Sir Philip," said Johnson, extending his hand for the prison papers. "I came to ask you to start me in life again with a set of carpenter's tools."

BLACK-SANDING

VISITORS to Brighton (and I dare say to other coast towns, but it is only at Brighton that I have studied them) whose windows command a view of the beach must have noticed, on the fall of the tide after a gale, men walking along the shore with bent shoulders and downcast eyes. They walk singly as near the waves as may be without having their boots submerged. Now and then one will stoop and pick up something, and then move on again with the same deliberation and intentness.

These men are called black-sanders.

They are in the wake of every storm, and their purpose is to find articles which the unusually high sea may have brought to light during its disturbance of the pebbles, or which the waves have deposited. What their harvest is I have no notion, but it is not, I imagine, either rich enough or regular enough for black-sanding to be an occupation in itself. These men are otherwise engaged when the weather is placid; no boy is apprenticed to a black-sander.

Although the conditions of the calling are not

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comfortable, for it is carried on in wind and often rain, and walking on a beach is exceedingly wearisome, none the less, I have often wished to do a little black-sanding myself, just for the intense gratification of finding something. As it is, my only experience of the process was some forty years ago, when a vessel was wrecked near the Chain Pier and its cargo came steadily ashore. It consisted of oranges, which are a conspicuous fruit at all times, and particularly so when massed upon the ocean's rim, and Barcelona nuts, which are the very opposite, for on a pebbly beach they assume protective colouring, and are very difficult to distinguish. I need not say that all young Brighton was there to collect what it could, and such an orgy of nut-eating the town can never have known.

This was black-sanding of a sort, but, in spite of the competition and of nature's mimicry, too easy. The only thing I have ever done corresponding to real black-sanding is to seek the dark speckled eggs of the plover. One has a comparable thrill when, after walking up and down a stretch of Scotch moorland, in precisely the same attitude—bent head and short steps—and under very much the same conditions of weather, for an hour or two, one comes at last upon the nest. But it is not really comparable,

Black-Sanding

for the seeker of eggs knows his quarry, whereas the black-sander has an open mind, and may be gloriously surprised. The Brighton black-sander has a better time than most because of the crowded state of his beach in the summer months, for it is then that are dropped the articles that the winter tides lay bare. My informant was an old artist at the game, in a blue jersey with little silver rings in his ears: a grizzled, gingery fisherman who, when he is not fishing, is normally leaning over the railings near the Old Ship. "Bathing machines," he said, "let many an article slip through their crevices. People sitting or lying on the beach lose control of their pockets," he said. Thousands of odds and ends, but chiefly jewellery and coins, are lost in this way every season. He himself, not long since, had picked up two rings—a wedding ring and (saving the mark!) its keeper, which, no doubt, had been left in a bathing machine, and then, when the machine was moved back, had fallen out. There they had lain close together for months, until the wavelets appointed by fate (he didn't say this; I, with my superior culture, am saying this) dislodged the pebbles at the precise moment that he, another instrument of destiny, had come along with his keen black-sanding eyes.

We always used to hear that treasure-trove on

Luck of the Year

the beach belonged to the Lord of the Manor, but apparently he waives his rights. Nor, so far as I know, is the black-sander called upon to report his find to the police—a tiresome formality which would deprive the adventure of all its spice. There should be somewhere in the town a Black-sand Museum containing the most interesting of the discoveries—the unsaleable ones, of course.

What these so-called fishermen think about as they lean over the railings and look out to sea I haven't an idea, but whenever I gaze at it myself I reflect upon the enormous excitement we should all have if, on a certain calm day, the tide went on receding, and receding, and receding until it passed clean out of sight into some other ocean, and left the Channel dry. Then what a rush there would be for hidden treasure. Black-sanding carried out to the highest power.

And as the news spread, how the Londoners would crowd into the town to join the hunt. Half-acquisitive England in no time would be on its way across to meet half-acquisitive France in the middle. They would come by every means of transit, from aeroplane to uppers, but it is the aviators that would skim the cream.

And then, when all of them, except the crip-

Black-Sanding

pled and the sick, were in mid-Channel filling their bags and their pockets as hard as they could with treasure from the drowned ships (and every captain carries a sum of money in specie), perhaps the tide would suddenly come back. . . .

A POKER PROBLEM

WE were talking about the greatest disappointments—the saddest frustrations—of our lives; and this was B.'s story.

"All of you," he began, "have touched on purely superficial troubles. Mine is deeper. It is peculiar, too, in this, that although I was in a sense the sport of fate, I could, had I dared, and with absolute purity of motive, have taken fate into my own control. I suffered through my own decency and strength, a rare cause of disaster.

"It happened years ago, when I was a young man and therefore a foolish one. I was earning about three hundred a year and finding it far from enough, and so I had to be careful. The kind of things that I liked I denied myself; among others, cards.

"It chanced that I met some new people, influential in my line of business, and after dining with them I was asked to spend a weekend. They were wealthy and open-handed, and I found staying at their house an almost too agreeable change from my ordinary life.

A Poker Problem

"On the Saturday evening a number of neighbouring friends came in and it was agreed that we should play Poker. I knew quite well I ought to decline, being in no position to lose; but there, I was very fond of the game; I was young and excited by being in this company at all; I had not the courage to take up an uncompanionable line; and there was always the chance that I might win. It might be my evening; the cards might take a fancy to me. You never know. Besides I rather prided myself on my skill.

"I soon found out that although it might be somebody's evening it most emphatically was not mine. I could hold nothing at all, or if I did hold anything some one just beat it. I had three Kings twice and backed them freely, but three Aces or some other stronger combination were waiting to render them idiotic. Other players' bluff came off; mine didn't. For the most part I had depressing luck: a single pair, for instance, unfortified by the other three cards; or two pairs, that insidious snare, raising one's stake on which, according to the saying, has filled America's poor-houses.

"And all the while I was losing money. I lost consistently for two hours, until all my little luxuries for the next year had dissolved into thin air.

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"If I had been older and braver I should have stopped. But I lacked the nerve. I felt that it looked mean and squalid to leave off because one was not winning; nor did I want to convey the impression that I couldn't afford to lose. False pride is at the bottom of so many follies.

"By the time we entered on a final round of Jack-pots, when it cost double to come in, I had seen two months' salary melt away. And then followed a series of hands when no one had the necessary openers, so that the pool became enormous.

"The next deal had just been completed when a maid entered to say that Mrs. Blank, one of the neighbours who had joined us for the evening, was wanted on the telephone; and we waited for her. After a few moments she came back to say that she must return home at once as one of the children wasn't well—she lived close by, I gathered—but we needn't stop the game: her husband, who had been sitting out, would play her hand for her.

"And so she went, every one going into the hall to see her off, leaving me, a comparative stranger, alone in the room.

"Perhaps you see what is coming? No? Well, they all came back and took up their cards again. I also took up mine, which I had not yet looked at, and was electrified to discover what

A Poker Problem

it consisted of. For the first time in the evening the luck had come to me. It was the finest hand possible—a Royal flush. Ace, King, Queen, Jack and Ten of Spades. On such a hand as that I could safely bet every penny I possessed. But then my blood turned to ice, for I realised that I could do nothing because I had been alone in the room. And after losing all the evening, too!

“I had a winning hand, but I didn’t dare to play it. All those lost luxuries were in array before my eyes, and I hadn’t the pluck to recover them.

“The struggle was not one of conscience. I was as innocent as Mrs. Blank’s sick baby; there was no question of right or wrong. It was a struggle between timidity and poverty, complicated by sophistication. I could not play the hand because I was afraid, the avoidance of suspicion being impossible. *You see, I had had time to select five unbeatable cards. I had not done that, but I had had time to do it.* Everything was against me. If just one other of the party had remained in the room with me I should have been on velvet. But none had. The most guiltless of men, I was destroyed by a possibility of guilt.

“The result was that when the dealer asked me how many new cards I wanted I replied, in

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as nonchalant a manner as possible, 'None, thank you; I'm away,' and threw down my hand.

"I then had the additional mortification of seeing that magnificent kitty, with all its surrounding wealth, fall to the holder of three paltry eights."

IN THE BOX-ROOM

WHEN midnight strikes there is no room in a country house more animated than the box-room, for not only have the trunks and bags of the week-end guests been placed there, all with recent experience, to recount, but the old stagers belonging to the house are there also, only too eager for news of the great world. Such a chatter goes on as you wouldn't believe!

How I obtained my report of the conversation at Saxton Hall on Saturday night I am not proposing to divulge; but it exists, and I hope that a summary may be interesting.

It began with a venerable hair trunk, very bald in patches, and studded with brass-headed nails, that had been there undisturbed for a century, asking if the coach-journey had been easy.

"I have asked this question every week for years and years," the hair trunk said, "but no one has ever answered. You see, I've always been at the far end of the room. But this week there has been a rearrangement and I'm much nearer to all of ye."

Luck of the Year

"Coach!" exclaimed a hold-all. "What coach?"

"Didn't you come by coach?" the old trunk asked. "Then I suppose it was a po'chay?"

"Speaking for myself," said the hold-all, "I came by motor. But more of these others came by train. Coaches are obsolete and as for the other thing you mentioned, I've never heard of it."

"Well, well," quavered the old trunk. "That's strange. I went everywhere in the boot."

"Talking of boots," said an elaborate boot box, "I wonder how many of you have travelled in the tail of an aeroplane"—(I regret to say that it pronounced it 'areoplane')—"as I did the other day! From Paris. Very uncomfortable and perilous, I thought it. We were quite ill, some of us. I had no idea that the air was so rough."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the hair trunk querulously. "I remember the 'Sky Rocket' coach; but we never called it an airy anything, although it was airy enough on the roof, Heaven knows."

"*À propos* of novel adventures," said a Gladstone bag, with a strong voice, who thought that the hair trunk should not be encouraged further, "I am probably the only bag here that has been

In the Box-Room

sliced open by a *rat d'hôtel*. A very horrid experience, I can assure you. It occurred in Paris, and the thief got away with four figures—a thousand of the best. I had a most exciting time: I was powdered for finger-prints; eminent French detectives examined me; but what I chiefly remember was the manager of the hotel affirming without ceasing, to every one in turn, that, as my owner had not deposited his valuables in the hotel safe, the hotel was not responsible. He said it again and again and again. I believe that when I am finally scrapped the words 'Not responsible' will be found engraved on my brass plate."

"Did they catch the thief?" some one asked.

"Not to my knowledge," said the Gladstone. "It was very sad, because we were on our way to dear old Monte; but we never got there. My poor owner had to return to London, where I was stitched up. It was nothing to do with me, of course, but he never forgave me; and I belong now to his nephew."

"Ah, Monte!" said a large Innovation; "I've just come from there. If you were to look at my side you'd see the label of the best hotel. In fact," she simpered, "I'm covered with best hotel labels. We've been everywhere, my lady and I, and always to the best hotels."

"That," said a cynical kit-bag, "does not

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necessarily mean anything. In your case, of course, it is all right," he added gallantly; "but I've known of lots of cases where people who never travel get the labels from abroad and themselves stick them on. It creates a wonderful impression, I'm told, at seaside boarding-houses."

"Is that possible?" asked a brand-new suitcase. "I had no idea such things could be. How dreadfully dishonest!"

"Ah! you're so young," said the kit-bag, "you wouldn't know. You will find as you go on that this is a world largely made up of flashy show and pretence, where bags are too often taken at their own valuation."

"I may be young," said the suit-case, "but the cow I was made from was old, very old. I heard the workman say so."

"That may be," said the kit-bag; "but what do cows know, anyway? Nothing but meadow talk and cattle-stall chatter. Cows see nothing of the great world. No, my lad," the kit-bag continued, "experience in our life can come only by age."

"And travel," put in a very old but still active trunk covered with stains and patches and strongly bound at the corners—"travel is the thing. Age can be the lot of the stay-at-home; experience needs movement. Wait till you have

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been to India, as I have, and China and the Cape and America."

"But all travel need not be abroad," said a new voice. "This notion that you're no good unless you've left your own country is absurd."

"Who is that speaking?" asked the old trunk, whose age and infirmities from much battering on foreign platforms and unceremonious descents into the holds of channel steamers had not improved either its sight or hearing. (You have seen how now and then the swinging crate sheds a Saratoga or two? It is one of the beguilements while we wait for the boat to start.)

"That," replied the kit-bag, "is a 'Leatherette.'"

"Do we want to know what a Leatherette thinks about anything?" the old trunk inquired.

"These are democratic times," said the kit-bag. "There are even Communists in the House."

"*À propos* of Parliament," said an iron-bound box, "what I want to know is why isn't something done to make porters more careful? There ought to be a law. What do these statesmen make laws about, anyway? I still ache all over from the treatment I received at the stations yesterday. Porters have no mercy. Why?"

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"It is because they never travel themselves," said the kit-bag. "No one has ever seen a porter travelling. If they travelled and their own luggage was injured, they would be more thoughtful. But they don't travel. They stay for ever on the same platform, being very noisy with the doors and rough with the boxes. It corresponds to a holiday with them."

"By the way," said a new suit-case to a neighbouring portmanteau, "what is that little blue label of yours? No one else seems to have one like it."

"Oh, that," said the portmanteau. "That's the label the German customs-house officer stuck on it on the frontier the other day. Coming home."

"Were you examined?" asked the cynical kit-bag.

"Was I not?" replied the portmanteau. "I've never been so rummaged in my life. They're after cocaine and saccharine, I'm told."

"It's funny," remarked the kit-bag, "how differently people can be treated. My man and I always get through without examination. Preferential treatment; there's nothing like it. I suppose your man has a suspicious look. Tell me, which was he?"

"My man," said the portmanteau proudly, "is Lord Lateleigh."

In the Box-Room

"Lord Lateleigh!" said the kit-bag. "Pooh! one of the new ones. Wasn't he wearing a fur-coat on the platform this afternoon?"

"Yes," said the portmanteau, "he was."

"Hm!" said the kit-bag. "That was he, was it? Well, that kind of man's luggage *would* be examined."

"What do you think they called me in America?" the Leatherette inquired. "They called me a 'grip.'"

"Better than you deserved," murmured the old and travelled trunk.

THE UNHAPPY BISHOP

ONCE upon a time in the city of Siena lived a good Bishop, who when he died was buried with great pomp and ceremony in the cathedral. His tomb was built into a recess in the wall of one of the aisles, and beneath it was a little grotto with a skeleton in it, such as you often find in English cathedrals—there are, I think, two at Winchester, and there is certainly one at Westminster, if not more—the purpose of which is to remind those of us still living that some day we shall be called away too, and therefore we had better behave ourselves while there is time.

And in this little grotto an oil lamp was placed, the good Bishop having bequeathed to the cathedral a sum of money for its maintenance; for it was never to go out day or night, but to burn on and on for the well-being of his soul.

That was three or four centuries ago, but the trust was respected with such zeal that the lamp was always alight, throwing its little beams on the sinister bones of the *memento mori* and striking a chill of fear into the hearts—at

The Unhappy Bishop

any rate, for a moment—even of the most frivolous of the tourists who are always crowding into this famous building, to see the pavement-pictures in coloured marble which the great artists of Siena designed.

Meanwhile the good Bishop was happy in heaven, singing praise and communing in affection and ecstasy with the Blest. You will know what he looked like if you recall to mind *Fra Angelico's* painting, all blue and gold, of Paradise, at S. Marco's in Florence. And so passed year after year, until their number ran into hundreds, as one serene and joyous day.

It was, I believe, somewhere in the eightennineties that a break occurred in this blissful existence, for suddenly one afternoon the good Bishop felt a dart of pain pierce his soul—a kind of spiritual toothache, as he himself expressed it to a Cardinal friend. The first acute agony was not repeated, but was replaced by a steady discomfort and depression, under which the good Bishop lost his bright looks; and those who sang near him detected a flatness in certain of his notes that had never been there before. As no improvement occurred, it was decided to make inquiries on earth as to what could be the cause, and one of the swiftest and most capable of the Angel Messenger Corps was dispatched to Siena to see if anything was wrong.

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He was gone but a brief space and returned with his news. A progressive cleric, he reported, had recently taken over the control of the cathedral, and among his changes was the installation of electric light. That the building itself should be provided with the new illuminant was probably an advantage and a saving of labour and therefore of expense; but unfortunately the wires had been extended to include the good Bishop's tomb, the lamp under which was no longer the simple little affair of oil and wick, requiring pious and punctual attention, but an ordinary glass bulb, with a filament of carbon in the middle, that was never switched off. And he had ascertained, the Messenger's report concluded, that it was at the very moment that the oil had given way to electricity that the decline in the good Bishop's health, happiness and vocal accomplishment set in.

"Can nothing be done?" the good Bishop inquired. "It is all very unsatisfactory, and I wonder what has become of my bequest, a large part of the idea of which was that some poor fellow—or rather a long line of poor fellows—would benefit as tenders of the lamp."

But nothing at all could be done. The spirit of materialism and efficiency had come to stay, with its substitution of mechanism for human

The Unhappy Bishop

agency; and so the good Bishop has never recovered either his old fitness or his *timbre*.

That, as I have said, was in the eightennineties, and the good Bishop gradually and mournfully resigned himself to the new conditions. But worse was to come, as I am one of the few persons to be able to relate. Last October—1922—I chanced to be in Siena, at a time when the power-station of the city was in a very disorganised and disconcerting state. At all kinds of odd and inconvenient times—in the middle of dinner, during the play, as one walked at night in the narrow streets (which were being repaired just then)—the lights would go out, leaving every one in total darkness; and then again, and perhaps again. This went on with maddening caprice for several days. Sometimes the dark interval lasted only a minute; sometimes much longer; and people got into the way of keeping candles handy.

Well, for the most part both the Sienese and visitors took it cheerfully, even laughingly. But not I. Knowing what I did about the good Bishop, how could I do anything but grieve? "There," I said to myself as the light gave out again—"what a twinge that must have given him! Not even an electric glimmer under his tomb now. The poor old soul! The poor old soul!"—and I groaned in sympathy.

WHEN TIME IS MONEY

IT isn't often," said Rennie, "that as one gets older one wants inordinately to meet anybody new, but I must confess to finding Madame Bimilova, the Russian dancer, exceedingly magnetic. I don't mean that I lost my head over her; passion is extinct in this ageing frame; but her dancing fascinated me, and, when it was my privilege to meet her, her personality fascinated me even more; her beauty, her charm, her witty broken English. And when, although there were half a dozen good-looking young blades in the room, she particularly singled me out with an invitation to come in again and consider myself as always welcome, I was considerably bucked, I can tell you.

"As it happened, however, I was able only to go round once or twice again, because I was called away from London and when I got back the season was over and no one could tell where the dancers had gone. Some said Monte Carlo, some said Madrid; no one knew for certain.

"To make my story clear, I must now inter-

When Time is Money

polate a few remarks on the politeness of princes—in a word, punctuality. Because it was this Russian lady who cured me of it. Long ago I set myself a standard of punctuality which I must confess it was an infernal bore to keep up, but which I managed to stick to with some success and not a little detriment to my character; for the unpunctual assured me I was becoming in consequence more self-satisfied and offensive every day. People who are always punctual are like people who are always in the right: unbearable. All the same, I stuck to it and was very well pleased with myself in consequence.

“At that time,” he continued, “I had a friend who was completely with me in the practice of this virtue. It was our pride not only to be punctual, but to be exactly punctual. If I asked him to dine at the club at eight, he arrived just sufficiently before that hour to be able to take off his coat and hat and to be announced at the precise moment. It is no fun to be early; anyone can be early, although very few people are; but to be punctual—that was a real adventure! We carried our keenness so far that there was an arrangement between us that the one who was late paid the other a pound a minute as a fine.”

“Considering how full life is of accident and

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the unexpected, that was rather a risky step, wasn't it?" I asked.

"It was," he replied. "But we laid our plans accordingly. Knowing that most of the London streets are continually under treatment from leisurely labourers, we allowed ourselves plenty of margin if we were driving to one of these critical appointments. And that brings me to the point of this story.

"One morning—I am talking of two or three years ago—I was due at my friend's house for lunch at 1.30. I took all the precautions and arrived in the neighbourhood at 1.20. He lives in Portman Square, and I walked quietly up and down a side street until it was 1.27. I then advanced upon his door and at 1.28 was just turning to mount his steps when I heard my name called—'Mr. Rennie! Mr. Rennie!'—in the prettiest foreign accent imaginable.

"Glancing round, I saw that a taxi was drawn up and in it was the adorable Bimilova.

"I say 'adorable,' but at that moment I wished her in Siberia. No appearance could ever have been more inopportune. The woman that I had so longed to meet again was the last thing on earth that I wanted at that moment. She was an enemy to my pride; threatening my prestige; playing into the hands of my rival.

"I had, however, to go over and greet her.

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“‘You are fickle,’ she said. ‘You left me.’

“‘I explained why I had not been to see her any more.

“‘I missed you,’ she said. ‘Every evening I looked in vain. I thought I must have said something to vex you.’

“‘I assured her that this could never be the case; but I was paying her only half attention, my most intent thoughts being on the clock, on my broken reputation and on the financial aspect of the case.

“‘Just a moment,’ she said, opening the door of the taxi. ‘Do come in just for a moment. I have something important to say.’

“‘I’m awfully sorry,’ I began, ‘but I’m due here to lunch. They’ll be waiting.’ I was intensely mortified to catch a glimpse of my friend’s face at the window.

“‘Only just a moment,’ she urged. ‘No one expects you to be absolutely punctual.’ And I weakly gave way.

“She then began her story. The season had ended suddenly and left her high and dry. No plans had been made for the future. The manager had not paid her salary. Living in London was very costly. In short, would I lend her twenty pounds? I had seemed so kind, she looked upon me as a friend. Could she have been mistaken? No!

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"It was a quarter to two when I entered my friend's house, vowing to myself as I did so that I would never take the slightest interest in punctuality again.

" 'You're fifteen minutes late,' he said.

" 'I know,' I replied. 'I regret it deeply, but it wasn't my fault. I'll send you a cheque. All my ready-money has gone.' "

RIVALRY

From Mrs. Horace Spong to the Rev. Samson Spong.

DEAR SAMSON,—I was so glad to hear from Lydia that you are better. We have been rather nervous about you, for a cold at this time of year is often difficult to throw off. Horace is better too, and we are making our plans for Mentone as usual. I don't pretend to care much for this annual exile from home, but Horace counts on it.

I am,

Your affectionate sister,

GRACE SPONG.

The Rev. Samson Spong to Mrs. Horace Spong.

DEAR GRACE,—I can't think what Lydia was about to tell you that I am better. I am not better. If anything I am worse. Indeed it is within the bounds of probability that I shall never be anything but a wreck, for this cold is the most malignant that I ever had, and gives me no peace. I am miserable all day and at

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night unable to sleep. Either I am coughing or I have the feeling of being smothered.

Tell Horace that I envy him his recovery: he was always so much stronger than I. In fact, our dear mother often expressed surprise that as an infant I survived at all.

You are fortunate in being able to get to the South of France and avoid this terrible climate. I should like nothing better, but I dread the journey too much; nor would my straightened means, much depleted by excessive taxation, permit it. Horace has always been so richly blessed in worldly goods.

Your affectionate Brother,

SAMSON SPONG.

Mrs. Samson Spong to Mrs. Horace Spong.

MY DEAR GRACE,—Please don't write to Samson again about his condition. He much resented my telling you that he was better, although as a matter of fact he is—much better. He eats better, is more cheerful, except when he recollects that he is an invalid, and sleeps well. He may not always sleep right through the night, but like all men, if he is awake five minutes he thinks it is two hours.

Yours,

LYDIA.

Rivalry

Mr. Horace Spong to the Rev. Samson Spong.

DEAR SAMSON,—Grace has given me your message about my recovery. I only wish I had earned it; but, alas! I feel anything but a convalescent. In fact, in confidence, for I should not like every one to know, I am conscious of increasing weakness daily. I have even kept it a secret from Grace. There are some colds that seem to sink deeper the more you nurse them, and mine is one of them.

I am sorry for the pessimistic tone of your letter, but I feel sure that things are not so bad with you as you say. It is possible to take too gloomy a view of oneself, especially when one is weak, and I have discounted your remarks in consequence. You are a strong man *au fond* and you will shake this off very soon, I am convinced.

We are off to Mentone next week. It is a dreary business, but Grace likes it there, and what she likes is law with me.

Yours,

HORACE.

The Rev. Samson Spong to Mr. Horace Spong.

DEAR HORACE,—I wish you wouldn't write nonsense about my being strong. I am not strong and never was. I was always delicate,

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even before cold after cold enfeebled me, and now I am a wreck. Surely I am the best judge as to how ill I am! Now you, I consider, are strong. You may not look it. Only a strong man could undertake a journey to Mentone at this time of year, no matter on what pretext he went.

I will say good-bye, my dear brother, as it is exceedingly unlikely that you will find me here when you return in the spring.

Yours,
SAMSON.

Miss Hilda Spong to the Rev. Samson Spong.

DEAR UNCLE SAMSON,—I was very glad to hear the other day from mother that you are better. I send you a little present now as at Christmas I shall be far away in Switzerland with a Winter Sports party. We are going to some place thousands of feet up, where skating and ski-ing and bob-sleighbing are a cert. I will send you a card from there.

Your affectionate Niece,
HILDA.

The Rev. Samson Spong to Mrs. Horace Spong.

DEAR GRACE,—I should be glad if you would address the enclosed envelope for Hilda and

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dispatch it to her Swiss address, and let me know if the postage is deficient. If you are yourself writing to her you might give her a hint that it would be kinder not to send me a card as she has undertaken to do. I feel sure it would suggest snow and be harmful to me in my present delicate state. She is a dear girl, but her letter about those Alpine heights, although meant, I am sure, in all good faith, gave me a severe shock. I have just now to be very, very careful.

Your affectionate Brother,

SAMSON.

P.S.—Tell Horace that what he wants is more employment. It is when one is idle that one broods on one's health. He should take up some hobby.

Mr. Horace Spong to the Rev. Samson Spong.

MY DEAR SAMSON,—I really must protest against the suggestion in your letter to Grace that I am a *malade imaginaire*. Fortunately Grace and I understand one another and there is no fear of any mishap; but I can believe that there are households which might be undermined by such insinuations. So far from being idle, as you put it, I am continually busy. There is not a penny spent in this establishment, indoors or

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out, that I am unaware of: I see all the tradesmen's books; I know exactly how much petrol the car uses from day to day; in fact, I am constantly vigilant and interested. Please do not again refer to the matter.

While on this subject, let me say that it is increasingly borne in upon me that you made a terrible mistake when you gave up your living. You were far less faddy about yourself when you had your duties to perform. You were also more considerate for others. Your very gloomy reference in your last letter to your imminent decease might have caused me a really serious relapse, had I not just run into Corder in our London hotel and had a talk with him about you. But from what he says you are getting along famously.

My love to Lydia.

Yours,
HORACE.

The Rev. Samson Spong to Richard Corder, M.D.

DEAR CORDER,—I am sorry that after all these years we should have to part, but I must ask you for your account. I cannot continue with a medical man who gossips about his patient. I was much distressed this morning to learn from my brother that you had told him I

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was better. Apart from the fact that I am not,
I hold that a doctor's first duty is not to tell.
You have greatly shaken me.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

SAMSON SPONG.

WAX

I WONDER if I am unduly sensitive, or if many other people—or even most people—are also uncomfortable when they see wax models of ladies in the windows of shops: full length in the costumier's, and kit-cats in the perruquier's. There is something about these figures—their artificiality, the paltriness of their features, where every fine quality has been reduced to a petty prettiness—which makes me blush. It seems horrible that civilisation should come to this; that real women needing new clothes or a new style of coiffure should select the mode from such deplorable travesties of their own God-made forms.

And if I, more or less a man, feel abashed and ashamed, what must the women feel whose own faces and limbs are thus counterfeited? Not that ready-made male outfitters dispense altogether with male models, but they are less degrading. They are bad enough, it is true, but they pose less and at any rate might be about to do something—start on a walk or (even the cricketers with belts) play a game. But the

Wax

wax ladies merely posture inanely and suggest idleness and vacuity of mind. They extend their arms at strange affected angles and crook their roseate slothful fingers; they hold their little pink empty heads at even odder angles. What, I ask again, can honest women think of such a parody of their sex, such a glorification of uselessness? But most probably they don't think at all. We are always being more sensitive for women than we need.

It would be interesting to see these dreadful commentaries on life being actually made. I set out on a pilgrimage not long since to find the rocking-horse factory in Islington where, I was told, one man spends all his time (eight hours a day; the Rocking-horse Makers' Union won't allow more) in painting the nostrils of the steeds a rich vermillion. I wanted to watch, at his labours, a nostril-painter; but the factory had been moved too far afield.

Even more should I like to see the artist who conceives these waxen *houris*. I should like to ascertain how he chooses his type, why he fancies women with trumpery noses and insignificant mouths.

Apparently there is nothing that shopkeepers will not do in the interests of profit. Taste they disregard. It is bad enough to hang their wares on these fatuous caricatures of humanity; it is

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worse, as I saw somewhere the other day, to set two real girls, busy with needle and thread, in a window, and between them a wax figure affecting also to be sewing. This is a spectacle for groundlings. What can one hope from a world in which such vulgarities have a tolerated place?

Except for the dead, wax is not a good medium. It never looks like life. I have seen wax-works all over the world, but never a figure that could take one in. At Madame Tussaud's, which I visited again only a few weeks ago, there may be a likeness, but there is seldom any suggestion of vitality. The colour of wax is wrong. Also, wax cannot wear collars; cannot suggest comfort. I refer now to the wax that attempts to be men; women's clothes are different. But I suppose that wax is satisfactory enough to many persons, or Madame Tussaud would not have her vogue. To the question, why anyone should want to see a waxen representation of Mr. Baldwin or any other public man, especially now that the picture-papers are packed with photographs every day, I can offer no reply; although, no doubt, psychologists could fill a book with the answer. It is the same kind of curiosity as that which ensures success for any volume of personal gossip—whether anonymous, pseudonymous, or frankly signed.

Wax

The most life-like head that I have ever seen is in painted wood—it is in the Bargello at Florence—the head of Niccolo Uzzano, by Donatello, and it almost speaks. Wax never approached the vivacity of this masterpiece. And in an old curiosity shop in San Francisco I saw a wooden statue by a Japanese carver. It was not a work of art, but a piece of what might be called plastic photography, yet it was almost alive too. The carver, whose name is Hananuma Masakichi, of Tokyo, had taken himself as his model, and with the assistance of mirrors had made a faithful representation. The figure was naked and life-size, and there was not a detail slurred. The hair was real, the eyes were of glass, everything else wood. Life Classes in Art Schools drew from it. So bright were the eyes, so sensitive the lips, that you might easily be deceived, under the right conditions, in thinking it a living Japanese; just as, after a while, if you stand beside it and look at it earnestly enough, the mouth of Niccolo Uzzano will smilingly move. No waxen features have ever done that—except possibly the lovely Flora attributed to Leonardo, now in Berlin. That is the one exception to prove my rule.

If the carver of the San Franciscan figure could be lured over here to make models of

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certain of our heroes, the result would be worth considering; but as he takes twenty years over each, Madame Tussaud need not fear any rivalry. If, indeed, she is ever to have a rival I should expect to find it in Mr. Dulac, whose tiny figure of Sir Thomas Beecham in the London Museum (that elastic institution) goes far to stultify my strictures against wax. His tiny figure of Mr. George Moore was a triumph too. And every one who has been to the Wallace Collection must remember the tiny but lively wax heads there. Perhaps that is the secret of wax—that it must never attempt life-size. Madame Tussaud's uncle, Christopher Curtius, indeed began as a modeller in miniature as the delicate little figures, including one of Voltaire on his death-bed, still preserved in the Marylebone Road, testify, and I wish that the convention had never been abandoned. A gallery of little figures by such an artist, artificer, and satirist in one as Mr. Dulac would be a delightful place of resort. He should consider the possibility.

“SI VIEILLESSE VOUDRAIT . . .”

STAYING once at St. Andrews on the occasion of a University festival, I was the guest of a hospitable scholar whose particular line of learning is not unconnected with English history; and in the brief intervals that occurred between the ceremonies, banquets and receptions of those crowded and hectic days, I played with his library shelves. One of the books that I took down was Pycroft's *Oxford Memories*, and I was pained, if not surprised, to find that it had no index. I replaced it with a sigh and took down another, a volume of modern reminiscences, and that also had no index; but the loss was less important because the author dealt only with writers and such feeble folk, whereas Pycroft's heroes were cricketers. Again, however, I sighed, for duty is duty, and to see it being flouted in this way was distressing. A book of reminiscences without an index is like—well, like a right hand with the first finger missing.

Sir James Barrie in his famous St. Andrews address on “Courage” seemed to think that only

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the young can help the world. But I wonder. . . .

That evening, it appears, after we had gone off to another of the entertainments, an aged man knocked at my host's door and obtained permission to enter. He was, he explained, one of the Senile Scouts—displaying his badge as evidence—and he was on his official rounds. The Senile Scouts, no less than their youthful colleagues with the staves and the wideawakes and the bare knees, have their duties to perform and the most cherished portion of their ritual is that associated with a good deed every day. This old fellow, bent upon performing his good deed, had found his way to our house and nothing could prevent him from doing it.

The result was that when my host and I got back somewhen in the very small hours, after a prolonged and not unconvivial sitting, we found that *Oxford Memories* was provided with a neat MS. index, so complete that at a moment's notice we could turn to any honoured name, whether of great batsman or great bowler.

* * * * *

No, this isn't true, of course. I have made it up. But it might be. I can think of few nobler callings for elderly persons with leisure than to provide unindexed books with indexes.

ONE SUNDAY AFTERNOON

ONCE upon a time—it was indeed early May—there were two small boys who after lunch on Sunday found themselves with nothing to do. It is a common predicament among small boys, and greater boys too, in this country, where, on the Day of Rest, in so many places and practically all villages, cricket (which had just begun and for which they longed with all their hearts) is forbidden.

In default, then, of any game, with its automatic organisation to occupy them, the two boys (whose names, I should say, were Henry and Harold) strolled out to be thoroughly unorganised until the clock which each carried in his little stomach should warn them that home was again the best place. In their pockets were thin trusty catapults, and they also carried sticks.

Their first stopping-place was a gate which promised a good swing, and upon this they swung until it was broken, and then they hastily passed on. The thought that their neighbour, Farmer Brown, would be put to the ex-

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pense of six shillings to mend it did not trouble them; but they accelerated their steps under the fear that he might be close at hand.

Having satisfied themselves that Mr. Brown was not in pursuit, they turned their attention to his live stock, and from the security of the hedge stung up a mare and a foal so effectually with their catapults as to drive them both nearly frantic.

They next picked and flung away a number of bluebells.

Then they crossed a sunny common, on which were a number of young silver birches springing gaily beside the path, and as they passed they pulled at the branches from which the little new buds were bursting into leaf, and snapped them off.

At the end of the common was a copse, and they walked warily along the edge of it in the hope of finding a nest. Soon their hopes were rewarded, for a blackbird flew screaming out of a bush—in the foolish way that blackbirds have. If only they could remain still, how many a human enemy would they frustrate! This timid bird, however, who had just completed her laying and was preparing to hatch out five little recruits to the sylvan choir, gave the show away so successfully that in a few moments the eggs were in the boys' possession.

One Sunday Afternoon

Harold at once seized three of them and, producing a pin, prepared to blow them; but Henry remarked that it wasn't fair that Harold should have three and himself only two, pointing out that he was not only the elder, but that he saw the blackbird first. Harold admitted that Henry was the elder, but denied the priority of vision. As a matter of fact, he said, it was he who had both proposed the search for a nest at that place and who had spotted the mother's emergence.

As neither would give way, the arbitrament of fisticuffs was resorted to, during which (for they did not fight by Queensberry rules) both boys were severely kicked and all the eggs were smashed.

For a while after this they kept at a considerable distance from each other and sulked; and they might never have become reconciled and happy again but for a piece of unprecedented good fortune.

Their crowning stroke of luck was this: Harold suddenly observed a very small rabbit cross the road and hide under the bank. It was exceedingly tiny, as rabbits are apt to be in May, and it was one of so large a family that the parents had not yet had opportunity to instruct it in the dangers of the world. It was too young to know that the rabbit, for all the pretty

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nursery literature which has elevated it into a hero and all its soft woolly counterfeits with which small children are comforted in their cots (both Henry and Harold had cuddled one in their time), has astonishing powers of arousing the blood-lust of human beings and inflaming their most destructive and predatory instincts. When therefore the eager hands of Harold seized him he was only surprised. Terror was not yet.

Upon this part of my story I do not care to dwell. Let it suffice to say that both boys, having armed themselves with more than sufficient stones, the captive was liberated. . . .

And the moral? There is no particular moral to this tale, unless the desirability of adding games to Sunday's beguilement in the country, as has to a small extent been done in cities, should be seriously considered by anyone. The learned Dr. Parr, it is known, favoured it, so long as attendance at church had come first; and so did a divine of more recent activity, the Rev. Charles Kingsley, of Eversley; but the humane idea has not spread widely, although walled gardens are vociferous with "Fifteen Love," "Thirty all" and "Deuce" on every hand. But if there is no moral there is at least an odd thought that may occur to the reflective mind:

One Sunday Afternoon

which is, that among all the creatures through which Harold and Henry that Sunday afternoon cut their ruthless way Harold and Henry alone possessed immortal souls.

A MOTHER'S COUNSEL

ONCE upon a time there was a black cocker spaniel mother. She had been a mother before and would probably be one again. In fact it was her business to produce at regular intervals puppies which her owner, a breeder with model kennels and many clients, might turn into pounds, shillings and pence; and she performed her task punctually and with satisfaction.

As the day drew near for each new litter to break up and depart to their various new homes, it was her habit, being a good mother, to tell them something about what the great world was like and what might be awaiting them there.

On the occasion which I have in mind there were four puppies in all, and only the most highly trained eye could tell them apart. Four London smuts settling on a new chamois-leather glove are not more alike; but of course no cocker pup would do anything so dull as settle, especially when just on the point of entering adventurous life. I don't therefore pretend that

A Mother's Counsel

everything that mother said was listened to; but this is what she said.

"There are," she observed, "all kinds of different people to whom you may go; but my wish for all of you is that real sportsmen may want you. All dogs should work, and a cocker in particular."

"What is a cocker's work?" asked No. 1. They had no names as yet. Names would come later, and they often wondered what kind of names they would get.

"It's one of the disappointing things about human beings," the mother had told them, "the names they give dogs. Of course cockers are luckier than some of the others, because we're serious. But there's a dreadful monotony about even our names. It's our colour—they can never forget we're black. 'Nigger' and 'Nig,' 'Topsy' and 'Sambo'—you'll meet them everywhere and perhaps be called those names yourselves. You might all be 'Nigger' if you go to different homes. But, at any rate, that's better than the toy dogs—the Poms and the Pokes and the Yorkshire terriers—they're called 'Fifi' and horrible things like that. . . ."

"Nothing would induce me to be called anything so idiotic," interposed No. 1, who was of an independent and assertive character.

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"Never," he added, never," sinking his teeth well into No. 3's left ear by way of emphasis.

But this is a diversion.

"What is a cocker's work?" asked No. 1.

"A cocker's proud duty," said the mother, "is to follow the gun and obey his master. But nowadays there is so much shooting without dogs that I'm afraid some of you will lead frustrated lives. But you must try to be obedient, none the less. And not only obey your master but adore him. There is no harm in your being friendly with the whole family, if it's not done to excess. And of course you must never be cross with a baby."

"Not even if it hurts us?" asked No. 2.

"No, not even if it hurts you, and no matter how much. That's a point of honour with cockers."

"But you must never," she went on, "be more than commonly civil with strangers or visitors, not even if they feed you. In fact, however greedy you feel, I want you, if possible, to refuse any food that visitors and guests at the house offer you. Will you try?"

"We'll try," said the puppies, but there was no ring of confidence in their tones.

"Well," the mother continued, "perhaps that is rather a lot to ask; and if you were to fail it would not mean the end of the world. But if

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you were to fail in putting your master first—ah! Always put your master first. You will be devoted to your mistress, but you must always put your master first—especially you girls.”

“Yes, mother,” said the girls. Two of the cocker puppies were girls.

“If you go to an honest shooting man, as I hope and pray,” the mother resumed, “you will not only be more likely to get good names, but you will be properly looked after. You will live hard. But if you just go to be a companion there will be temptations to live soft, and I want you to withstand these. It is the cockers’ cross that they get too fat. All do. I am too fat myself.”

“Oh, no, darling,” said the puppies.

“Yes, it is true. I am already too fat and soon I shall be much too fat. But one can postpone this calamity by eating sparingly and taking plenty of exercise and not sleeping too much—although sleeping is very sweet, especially where they keep good fires and soft hearthrugs. For this reason I hope you may go to a district where there are plenty of hares. You are not likely to overtake one, but it is fun to pursue, and it will help you to keep your figure. The hares I have pursued!” She sighed.

“Did you ever catch one?” asked No. 4.

“No, my dear,” the mother admitted. “And

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I'm very glad, for I'm sure I shouldn't have known what to do with it if I had; but it was fun to pursue." She sighed again.

"And so," she said, "you will all do your best, won't you, to keep fit and be a credit to your father and to me?"

And they promised.

"But by the way, mother," said No. 3, "why don't we ever see father? We've never seen him. One would almost think that cockers don't have such things as fathers."

"They have them," said the mother, "but they rarely know them. Very few dogs are on terms with their fathers, and well-bred dogs almost never.

"What I most wish that any of you may not do," she continued, "is to be sold to a city owner. It is dreadful for a cocker to have to live in London. You would be led about on a string, which is most humiliating and against nature."

"London? What is London?" asked No. 1.

"London is a great place, made of stone and asphalt, where there are no rabbits, and no partridges, except those that hang dead in poulterers' shops. It is full of hurrying impatient people on the pavements and cruel rushing wheels in the road. It is no place for a dog."

They all shuddered and drew closer.

A Mother's Counsel

"I'll never go there," said No. 1 firmly.

"If, however, any of you are fated to become Londoners," the mother went on, disregarding his outburst, "I most earnestly hope that you won't be sold to an actress, because then your lot would become uncockerly indeed."

"What is an actress?" asked No. 2.

"An actress," said the mother, "is a beautiful lady, in the public eye, who, if she has a dog, likes to carry it——"

"No one shall ever carry me," cried No. 1.

"—and when she is photographed for the papers—as she is every day—is careful that her darling little doggie is photographed too."

"How hateful!" said No. 1.

"So you see," the mother went on, "why I don't want any of you to belong to an actress: you would always be under her arm and always facing the camera for *The Sketler* and *The Tatch*. Not that I mind your being famous characters, but if you must be photographed I would rather you were at the heels of a real master with a gun. Wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes, mother," said they all, while No. 1, who, as we know, always spoke in italics, went on to affirm that nothing would ever induce him to become an actress's property under any provocation whatever.

At this moment the dog-breeder appeared at

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the kennel door with a beautiful lady who filled the air with strange perfumes and talked in rippling tones. It was an actress bent upon buying the sweetest and darlingest little black cocker for her very own, no matter what it cost! After a long period of mind-changing and ecstatic dubiety, she made her choice. Need I say that she chose No. 1, and that No. 1 was borne away under her arm?

The last thing that the others heard as he passed out of their ken was the actress's voice of silver saying, "The pet! I shall call him 'Tou-tou.'"

LONDON IN JUNE

I REMEMBER some verses by Andrew Lang in the *causerie* called "At the Sign of the Ship," with which (how many years ago!) he used to enliven *Longman's Magazine*. They were based on some statistics that had been published, bringing out the curious fact that more people commit suicide in June than in any other month, and the lines began:—

"Why do we kill ourselves in June
When life, if ever, is so sweet?
When strawberries are coming soon?"

And then my memory breaks down. But why, indeed?

The answer probably is to be found at the "Weather Bureau"; for a wet and chilly June can be such a grief as many a sensitive soul might find unbearable. But when June is all smiles? That is a poser. Personally, unless there is some very sudden and additional reason, it will not be in June that I shall kill myself. More probably in January, when spring seems definitely out of reach and incredible.

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But in June—no. For June is the perfect month. June produces not only strawberries and cream, but cherries; June has the Derby in it and Ascot; June has good cricket at Lord's and the Oval; June sees the beginning of the Wimbledon meeting; June has the Olympia Horse Show; June has the King's birthday, with its concomitant celebrations, and the Prince of Wales's birthday, too; June has the glorious Fourth and the procession of boats; June has asparagus and new potatoes and young gooseberries (forcing that impostor, rhubarb, into a back seat); and, perhaps above all, June has green peas. And in the flower garden June has roses, and in the hedges June has honeysuckle.

A fine June day is one of the most intoxicatingly joyful of experiences, with every leaf fully out and the sky clear, and the air scientifically warmed by that great engineer, the Sun. And we can enjoy it in London to the full—although it is our last chance, for with July come fruition and hints of decay. But when it is fine in June, London is as fine as the country, and I adjure you not to rush to the country just because the heavens are blue. Stay in London and see how fair she can be, and give her her due. Because, for the country to be beautiful in June is nothing: that is the country's *métier*; but for London to be beautiful is a triumph.

London in June

As a great Londoner said, "One green field is very like another"; but London is full of diversity, and never so enchanting as on Midsummer Day—even though midsummer is a misnomer; for summer officially does not begin till June 22nd, two days before this condition of midness is claimed for it.

Convention ordains that directly the sun shines we either seek the railway station, or crank up the car, or mount a bicycle, in order to escape from the town. What a mistake! I want to hear of some one in the heart of the country exclaiming as he draws the curtains and discerns the promise of a cloudless day, "It's going to be fine! Let's go to London and enjoy it. How wonderful the light will be on the stone spires! How beautiful will St. Martin's be, how exquisite St. Mary le Strand! Perhaps they'll be shearing sheep in Kensington Gardens—those nice dark grey London sheep. How bravely the tugs will be cleaving the ripples of the Thames, with their string of barges in tow! How delicious in the late afternoon will be the west side of Berkeley Square seen through the trees! The sombre façade of Gray's Inn across Bacon's garden should be superb to-day! Let's get an early train, and then we'll have time to see everything. Think of the gay buses in Whitehall! How jolly the

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pillar-boxes will be under such a sun! These nightingales are very monotonous; it will be a real change to hear an ex-Service men's band again. What a pity they've cut down the plane tree in Staple Inn! But never mind, there are some beauties in the Temple. Hurry up for London in June."

That is how I should like to think rural dwellers can feel on a dazzling June day.

JUSTICE

THE famous Judge died and his soul flew up.

The door was shut.

The famous Judge was not accustomed to delays. On earth everything had been made easy for him: his chauffeur had tipped the wink to the police; the Law Courts' officials had cleared the way; whoever may have had to wait it was not he. At home, too, his wife had oiled most of the wheels, while his clerk, his butler and his parlour-maid had oiled the others.

But the gate of Heaven was shut.

The Judge was furious.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"You can't come in, sir," said the janitor.

"Not come in!" exclaimed the Judge. "Do you know who I am? I am Sir Lycurgus Scales."

"That's the point," replied the janitor. "I was told to shut the door against Sir Lycurgus Scales. We always know who people are."

"How do you know?" the Judge inquired.

"Wireless," said the janitor.

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"But that's a new invention," said the Judge.

"Not with us," said the janitor; "we've had it since the word 'Go.'"

"I demand to see St. Peter," said the Judge.

"I'll call him," said the janitor. "He wants to see you."

St. Peter came.

"My dear St. Peter," said the Judge in his blandest tones, "surely there is some mistake. You know me; I've been dispensing justice for years. There could not possibly be any reason for not letting *me* in."

"I'm sorry," said St. Peter, "but there's no mistake; my orders are explicate: 'Don't admit Lycurgus Scales.'"

"But why?" asked the Judge. "But why? I've led the most blameless of lives. I've brought up a family; I've been fond of my wife, or, at any rate, I've stuck to her; I've played the game; I've been honest too in all my dealings, and I've subscribed handsomely to charities."

"Yes," said St. Peter, "we know that. It's all in the Book. In most ways your record is admirable. But there's this against you: you pretended you were deaf."

"When?" asked the Judge.

"Continually," said St. Peter. "In court.

Justice

You told witnesses you couldn't hear them when you could."

"But supposing the charge is true, is it so serious?" asked the Judge.

"Yes," said St. Peter, "we think so. We think that judges should help people, not embarrass them. Witnesses are nervous; they don't know the ropes; they are strange to law courts and all your terrifying machinery, and you don't help them. You pretended you were deaf."

"Is that fatal?" asked the Judge.

"Yes," said St. Peter. "Here. You knew how unhappy they were and you didn't help them. That is the charge against you. It's perfectly true that you stuck to your wife and subscribed to charities. We've got it all down. But you didn't help witnesses. You pretended to be deaf. And that's fatal. I'm very sorry, but you can't come in."

LAST WORDS

HOW a great man dies should be of no importance compared with the great fact of his entry into the world; but the biographers concentrate upon the exit. There are reasons enough, of course, why they should, not the least of which is that a man at the end of his life has proved himself, whereas no one can tell, since genius is not necessarily transmitted, what a baby may become. If Shakespeares and Napoleons consistently bred Shakespeares and Napoleons, no doubt every accoucheur would bring his Boswell and we should lack no details.

But as the world is constituted, the newly born escape attention. Were babes gifted with speech it would, none the less, be quite as interesting to have a record of their first impressions on opening their eyes as it is to know what this or that eminent person said as he faded from the world which those others are just entering; particularly as dying men rarely have had their faculties.

Eve and Minerva are prominent among the very few persons who had it in their power to

Last Words

make a birth-bed utterance, and we have no record of what either of them said. Minerva's remark would have been brainy: that we know, and no more.

Thought of one's own death is not cultivated. Until we reach a certain age we think we are immortal; after the realisation of this fallacy we avoid the subject altogether, or as much as possible. The preparation of a suitable valediction is probably very rare. Speaking for myself, not less mortal than anyone else, I can affirm that I have never considered the matter until this moment, when my pen had the audacity to introduce it, and I shall forget it again very quickly. But even if we rehearsed our exits we should probably muddle them, for the occasion is not one to assist memory; it is at once too disturbing and unique. And there could be no prompter. At least, one does not see anyone, even the most theatrical and pompous, calling feebly to his wife, "My dear, I think it is time now; but I can't remember. What were those 'last words' I arranged to say?" No, the most that we do is to hope that we shall go out decently: suddenly if possible.

Probably the only persons who do actually prepare "last words" are duellists. I am not basing this pronouncement on recollections of Mark Twain's account of Gambetta's fire-eating

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escapade, although that cannot be ignored. Duellists and murderers are alone in knowing for a certainty that they may be dead to-day. I suppose that the annals of crime contain numbers of scaffold speeches; but it is a form of literature that does not much interest me. I remember, however, the dying wish of the American malefactor about to be electrocuted, whose last wish was that he might give his seat to a lady.

Charles Lamb, in good health, had expressed the wish that his last breath might be drawn through a pipe and exhaled in a pun, but when the time came he murmured the names of Procter, Moxon, and other friends, and fell into unconsciousness. Hood actually did make a death-bed joke, but it was only near his end, not at the end itself. (Some one told him that one of the family had swallowed ink in mistake: "What shall she do?" "Swallow some blotting-paper," said Hood.) Hazlitt's last words, spoken in Lamb's presence, were: "Well, I've had a happy life!" Those really were last words, but Wilde's remark that he feared that he was "dying above his means," and Charles the Second's famous apology, "I'm afraid I'm an unconscionable long time dying," were neither said *in extremis*. Words uttered on a death-bed and "last words" are very different.

Last Words

One of the most human and natural of true "last words" that I ever met with was spoken by an old woman whose life had been a long piece of drudgery: the counterpart of the old woman in the poem, who, when dead, was "going to do nothing for ever and ever." Her nurse, listening for signs of vitality, heard her say, "Now for a good long sleep!" She then sank into the next world. That is a good example, for it shows that the mind was clear. A friend of mine who died two or three years ago, after a wearing illness, went out, under the influence of morphia, with a smile on his face and the statement, "I am deliciously comfortable."

It was on his death-bed that Hokusai, the most wonderful of Japanese artists, who died in 1849 aged nearly ninety, said, "If Heaven had lent me but five years more I should have become a great painter"; but they were not, I believe, his last words. Speaking of Japan and of endings, but in this case the ending of a book, one of the most striking last words I can recall is that to a little account of her husband which the widow of Lafcadio Hearn—a Japanese lady—wrote a few years ago. After describing his dying days, she says simply, "This was too easy a death for me," and the record is done. The phrase, extended, means that such

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was her love that, if her own wishes were alone to be considered, she would have chosen for him a much longer illness in which her solicitude might be put to constant strain. "This was too easy a death for me"—there is something very fine and beautiful and touching in that strange sentence.

